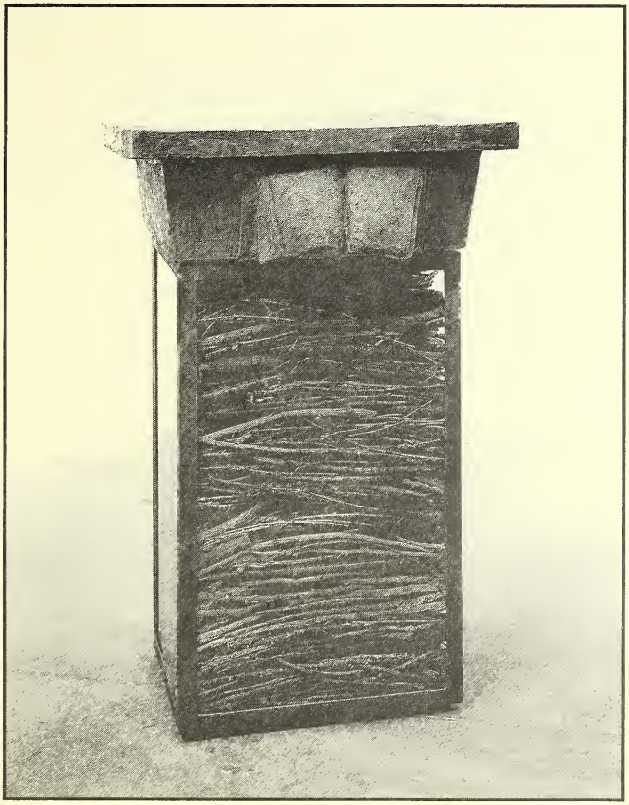
# Mount Voices

**Spring 2000** **Volume IV**



A Journal of Poetry and Prose

Mount St. Mary's College

# Mount Voices

## A Journal of Poetry and Prose

A Publication of Mount St. Mary's College
12001 Chalon Road, Los Angeles,
California 90049

# Mount Voices

A publication of
Mount St. Mary's College

Editor: Joyce Liu

Staff: Shelli Branscomb
Jamie Jacobs
Amanda Prince
Adriana Serrano
Nury Yoo

Faculty Advisor: Marcos McPeek Villatoro

Printing by Collegiate Press Company,
Northeastern University, 70 Forsyth Street, # 017,
Boston, MA 02115. Phone 1-800-635-0695.

Cover art by Jody Baral . Layout by Amanda Prince and Nury Yoo.

Thanks to Dr. Jane Lingua and Sister Mary Williams for their support. A special thanks to Jody Baral for his contributions. Special thanks also to David Missey and Gabriel Powell for their invaluable help.

Founded in 1996, *Mount Voices* is
published once a year at Mount St. Mary's College,
12001 Chalon Road, Los Angeles, CA 90049.
*Mount Voices* features the work of
Mount St. Mary's undergraduates, non-
traditional students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and
administrators, as well as writers from
across the nation. All works belong to
individual authors. No works may be
reprinted without the permission of the
individual authors. For current submission policies,
please send a query with a self-addressed envelope to
Marcos McPeek Villatoro, English Department.

# Table of Contents

Foreword .....i

Poetry .....1

Prose .....37

*Dedicated to*
*Sister Karen Kennelly, CSJ,*
*President of Mount St. Mary's College*
*1989-2000*

# Foreword

When questioned if the pay is good for being on Staff, the answer is always a loud, "Yes!" But if you ask us to give you a breakdown of the money values—then forget it. Those of us who run around making phone calls and posters, while meeting at the ungodliest of hours, well...we don't get paid in cash. We don't even get a check. We never do. But we do get compensated. Believe it or not, we get paid a lot. After all the negotiations among Staff, regarding the multitude of submissions, the final decisions arrived with difficulty as we wiped the beads of sweat off our foreheads. What can we say? Amidst all the secret words of all the submissions, little explosions sprayed our visions like meanings pieced together in a frame of art. A bumper sticker once screamed out to us, "Reality is for those who have no imagination." And in the spirit of these wise words, we have abandoned all sense of reality while the everyday rush of our lives continues to gain momentum.

With this edition of Mount Voices, we present imagination to you on a platter in the form of a clay lectern, in hopes that you will see the meaning of our dedication. Breathe in the intoxication of these writers and their works.

Breathe in and be proud. Don't breathe out until you've reached that point in the magazine where the words hold you still. Just for a minute. Be still. Be proud.

As for the next time around, the pay won't be great—it'll be better. Some things are definite in this ephemeral world. Mark your calendar. Be there with us when we cash that paycheck.

Joyce Liu and Jamie Jacobs

# Poetry

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation

http://archive.org/details/mountvoicessprin04vari

## *Mi Compañia ...La Soledad*

Sentada en este rincón
Me pregunto si aun existo
¿Me conocen mis familiares?
¿O se habrán olvidado de mi?
¿Mis amigos ...me recuerdan?
¿O ya tendrán alguién más
Con quien sus problemas poder discutir?
¿Y mi novio...que pasó con él?
¿Se recuerda de mi nombre?
¿O ya tiene otro con el cual el mío
Poder sustituir?
Yo sé bien que si estoy viva
Pero no sé si en esta vida
O más allá de la mortalidad
Yo los veo a todos ellos
A todos aquellos que algún día
Me quisieron
Les platico y les digo
Como cada día los añoro
Y espero algún diá
Con ellos poder estar
Pero por el momento
Tendré que esperar
Y continuar aquí con mi compañia
En esta bulliciosa soledad

*Veronica Aguilera graduated from Mount St. Mary's in 1999. She now lives in Chicago.*

## *Who's Keeping Time*

The days go by and I lose count
I question what each year amounts
to...who's keeping time?
who measures a second of a thought in my mind?
all of the world's clocks I want to unwind, rewind
a misuse of the invention
to speed us up was not the intention
rather,
to be free
everything to see
the greatness and its immeasurability
so you're 10 minutes late
at least you or they had those 10 to wait
how can 10 minutes of life make you hate?
to be late or to wait you chose your fate
either way,
you're still alive one more day
to work and play
to admire the sea,
sun,
moon,
stars
all that's been here before there were cars, hollywood stars
the grass still grows green,
crown jewels remain queen after queen

The time traveler thieves
aim to make you believe
that Timex be keeping your time...don't be deceived
take your time to achieve
whether awake or asleep

And when the days go by and you lose count
you'll know the everlasting abounds
is timeless and cannot be bound

cylindrical, always round
360 degrees, time comes around and around
as does the world, noisy yet making no sound
so...who's keeping time while you're on this ground?
how much does it weight? How many pounds
or ounces, is that on your wrist
other's time you couldn't resist
as they did insist
had you programmed, set, like a playlist
no matter how good you just didn't fit
in their game, in their time
take some ownership of your own mind
so when the days go by and you lose count
you'll know exactly what you amount
to...you'll know who's keeping time
cuz only you measure a second of a thought in your mind

*Lydia Castillo is a Class of '97 Mount Alumni. She currently works for the ISAE*

*Not so, e.e.*

To e.e. cummings
A leaf falling meant
Loneliness.

To me
A leaf falling means
Losing control
Letting go
Floating in the Wind's embrace
Seeking a new resting place
Where the fallen leaf
Now waits...
To be crushed or crunched or blown
Away...
Until the earth claims it
And uses it
To bring forth...new life

e.e., I'd rather be like
My leaf
Than yours.

*Sister Joseph Adele Edwards is a faculty member at the Mount who teaches English. She has been published in the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter, Sisters of St. Joseph's Publications, Ligurorian, Mount Magazine, MSMC Many Voices, and Peck Road.*

# Marisa Hernandez

## *Old Man's Field*

That day his throat cracked in the field
as he sat scratching his tough beard,
relaxing after the feed. Drinking one last drink,
He bent to pick the midnight green and
curving with the hot summer wind
he lets sweat drip and kiss the earth.

He slaves, stripping the husk
moving his leathered hand down the grooves
of the maize, feeling its soft silk vein.
Gracefully and violently, cutting at the bruised
stalk, he fights the night.
Heaving rock and parasite to save his root.

Blue clouds turn cool gray and thunder.
As if to say old man you've paid your due.
And the mud begins to ooze, ooze from under
his dogged feet and the spitter spatter of the drizzle
is hot oil on the griddle, jumping out at him.
He turns and walks away.

*Marisa Hernandez is a sophomore pursuing an English major. Her hobbies include writing, swimming, and community activism.*

## *Neptune's Angel*

It was when Eleanor met her grandfather for the second time, at seventeen, that he jumped into the Potomac to become a fish. "To be a fish," he sang with scales of ethanol and menthol, "is to glide through crab pots." He sang scales sung through the Potomac amidst the islands and the little big girl whose white hair curled long with entrail tendrils. She reached into the cold for the stranger. Swimming scales up and high and diving scales purple he sang to oysters once microwaved in his trailer. Eleanor's hair followed the sound, tempted by ephemeral songs sung of a Norway that had never existed. It was the grandfather's iridescent scales that tantalized her quickly icing blue hair to scale her woman-child frame, like an anaconda necklace moist tentacle gown. It was when Eleanor met her grandfather for the second time, at seventeen, that she followed the blue tentacles into the Potomac to know too the scales sung of ice and swim scales still, floating after fjords. The fish swam through the iron bars of the crab pot before he gently stepped over the oyster bed to reach the conch, ringing of dead children.

## *freeway tolls*

I wonder where to hide after the rain.
I won't explain the wet slipped despair
inside our car, into the ghosts of streets.
I'm farther than the feedings of that underpass
where wakes, Karposi's and putas in pink
declared...ay, miha....with a sigh when I sought late.

Hopes for me were crystals on a cracked glass, now late
dreams bludgeoned by a little girl that reigned
power over smoke, tar, powder, but never pink.
It's tired, played out that skirts and pipes equal despair.
Ask once loved who's rich beneath the underpass.
I won't explain black fumes rising in the street.

Before opium, she kissed me on a street.
A midget with a tambourine said it was late.
I won't explain the heaven of the needle, under passing
tongues of girls between my legs and lips, and beating rain
beating, beating mothers and father's beating off despair.
I bleed from dope and fingers. I wear pink.

I have house and a husband. Should I say, "pink
nails and pills, shiva smoked on such and such a street
is what I think." I won't explain the pair
that knows me that I know. If I'm too late?
I'll say to, "hold me, please just hold me in this rain,"
and it will pass. Years that created me will pass.

I want those years to flee. They're never past,
but I'm passing now with a husband's pink-
rimmed orbs vacantly protecting me from rain.
When I danced Xanax salsa in that street
a different girl sold speed so I'd stay late
and lie I loved her. I have abused despair.

If you hold me I promise that my pair
of arms and eyes will suck what passed
in your life too-the blows and jail, liquor later
vomiting hallucinations of a pink
tattoo, my name, forgiven of the days of streets,
one hundred dollars, February's sheets in rain.

When under passages of metal myriad streets
meet pink acrylic, I'll whisper, "sshhh...it's late...
It's too late." There is despair in rain.

*Jamie Jacobs, upon her May graduation, will continue to explore and embrace life in all of its beautiful and unbeautiful forms. Her interests involve all human rights. Her hobbies are books and water.*

## *snapshots of my west*

In St. George, Utah
She dreamed of LA, and leaned
across the stained orange counter
to eye me curious and wonder
aloud why I'd ever want to leave.
As the door jingled shut to tease
her with my temporal passing-throughness,
I heard her sigh with a singular boredom
known only to girls from one-street towns
waiting for life to begin.
On Kelly Hill, I met an old man
who winters in Maui with a teen-aged wife.
He grew rich tending bales of blue-green weed
on 200 acres of isolation-razor-wired,
just in case.
The sign at the Southmost edge
of town reads:
Home to 937 nice people...and one Big Grouch.
The sign at the Northmost edge
of town reads:
Bullets...Bait...Beer
Driving through ghost towns perched
alongside mountainous slag of long-spent ore,
one wonders how far those children on the highway
will ride that bus to school. And just what
does their daddy do all day against a horizon
scabbed with cadavers of American cars
all the same rusty shade of day-old blood.
Belying the grandeur of the San Joachin,
Willows, California, was home half a night.
A roach skittered over the lid of my eye
at the Palms Motel that had none.
I grabbed the bags and left without paying.
It was 93 degrees at 2:00 a.m. and my
boxer shorts glowed as I sneaked away barefoot

tailed by the leer of a sweaty green moon.

## *What Brain-Voyeurs Glimpse*

as I sit at Starbucks and count my change
someone in Belgrade is counting
their dead
would it be so wrong to steal five grand
from the kids' college fund to purchase and install
absurdly splendid melon-shaped
plastic (toxic?)
tits?
oh I know I'm being lied to
mostly by men who are mostly white
who are mostly convinced that we are right
and "they" are always wrong:
communists, muslims, uncivilized tribes
who share the misfortune of living on top
of something we need, we want, or assume
is rightly ours.
We're mostly convinced
that God is on our side.
if I win 10 million
in next Wednesday's lottery I'd write all day
and quit my job. I swear I'd give to charity
and never change a bit...OK a shiny Beemer,
But that's all, really, that's it
another lonely mismatched kid
just blew away his classmates. Note to self:
search son's closet for semi-automatic
weapons.

Hey, whatever happened
To Playboy?
Screw this suicidal idiot
dangling from the Mulholland bridge.
(The hour long lemming pilgrimage melts into a seething metal rage)
Does he understand
I have a 10:00 meeting!?!
I know there's a Mickey D's around here someplace.

Damn.

*Kelly Kester-Smith is an alumnus from the Mount. She currently writes full time.*

## *The Daisies*

The daisies
Swaying in silence
The sound of slight swishes
Every few seconds
Comes from the wind
        Does not come from it

It is voiceless
With petals looking
Like cut up tongues

*Kim Leng is a senior student at the Mount. She is graduating with a BA in English and History.*

## *Welcome*

Wild,
I pronounced
yet I stagger

barbeque chips and flaky skin
the crunch under covers with
B-movies muted in the dead of winter.

nothing sings but
the freezer hums
at this loveless motel where
money comes clean
& ha ha ha, chew
the unprotected.

## *For Roethke.*

I tried to cut the stems
where soft beliefs lay piled in cool mud, I drool
translucence bruised by red and blue
shards of white chocolate weapons
sharp against the chirp of a bed decrepit.

Sliding uphill, the taunt of lip balm
frightens my chapped, tight voice
surprising and calm, rain
and confusion merge into a pool nation.

The curve of a straight edge
tingles once again.

Silence penciled in by the clothed eye
nonsense ruined in the name of
glycerine-like kissing a hot throat
undergoing an exam.
Don't butcher this babe-
I'm not the only cloud in town.

*Joyce Liu is a third year student at the Mount. She is double majoring in English and Art.*

## *Manifesto*

I refuse to die
for love,
I did not only, just now,
start living,
to die anew.
If this, oh my heart, should fail
I will lift myself
from the ashes and continue
to walk along this trail of tears,
as my ancestors did,
always moving forward,
never back. Yes darling,
I refuse to lie at your
windowsill, a martyred Polyxena,
To gingerly repose
in the nakedness
of honor,
and sigh in longing
for that which has left,
never to return.
No, my love,
if this which has resided,
so long, in my body,
burned, so languidly,
in my soul,
should falter
within yours,
I will not break
into a million
tiny fragments of

infinity.
As much as I
may want to
end this
marionette dance between
life and death
this shall keep me
on Darwinian shores.
My love,
after you,
the world
will still
revolve.

*Maria Ochoa is a first year student at the Mount and is double majoring in English and Business.*

## *Music*

Near twilight
at the end of my street
a Chinese, crazy in old age

tosses a half-lit cigarette
and jingles the odd coins
in his pocket.

Two schoolboys
walk and listen to a third
whistling a modern ballad

full of the usual morals of today
yet a soulful story
of two men in love.

Upstairs Inez
scolds her Elena for dirty fingernails
and two stolen candy bars

while downstairs our neighbor's
gray-screened television
blares into the evening

muting even the cry
of an old seagull
abandoned by the flock in fog.

## *Third World Babe*

Two years past baby
still perfect

in that fetal position.
Her stomach, a mantle
displaying her right elbow
resting on her right knee
and sand the color of clove dust
covers her like a veil.
In some places
it is caked on thick
like patches of damp sand
sticking to the bottoms
of your feet
as you walk along
the marshy shoreline
of a California beach.

Halfway across the world from us
her head turned away
from her mother's breasts
large dark udders
no longer giving milk,
Now limp umbrellas
Protecting her
from the all day sun.

Baby is dreaming of the time
when she will have to leave
her mother's breasts
and her village in the sun
to become a "woman"
taking all colors of men
on top of her
and inside of her
until she is part of
their world.

But she will shut her eyes tight
and refuse to sniff
even for a second
that acrid sweaty stench
of semen
and of mother's milk

gone for good.

–

## *Proof*

Awake and beside you
I count your ribs, instead of sheep
with my fingertips, one by one
which you say, still drowsy
from last night's tequila,
are velvet thorns gently pricking you
and this is how I reach you in the dark
finding direction at each new ridge
reading you like a map
a place with many rivers.

The only window in our room
small and high above us
lets in little light
from a sliver of an imperfect moon
insistent as an uninvited guest
who shares the night with us
thin fingers of fog embracing her
as I embrace you.

Staring up through the gap between
the moss-coloured pillow cases
our temporary curtains
like the way you hang your shamrock boxers
over the shower wall
I think of the stars I cannot see
but yearn to count
because of their infinite numbers.

Beside you and awake
I turn you over in my mind
as I would examine
the underside of a leaf

just to see the intricate lines
and routes of veins
the proof that you are here.

*Kimberly A. Olwin is currently enrolled in the Creative Writing MFA program at San Francisco State University.*

## *Filigree Apocalypse*

Because
his curls' filigree corona
–breathtaking but betrayed
by their shadow:
against the blacktop,
a Dürer etching–
was so incongruous to
his party line when held
against the same sun,
I wanted to drive my arm into
his irises–jay threads woven
into worn denim–and
tear out fistfuls of the fibers there,
as though I could, while they
baked serpentine onto my palm,
wrench answers from such
organic matter.

*Amanda Prince is a junior majoring in English and History at the Mount.*

## *Fractions*

It is human;
bending through the prism.
Human when refracted through the degrees.
I am ashamed at how human I am,
how safely I can distil my love by fractions
into something like paraffin, fueling
petty flame.
In dreams, splicing
D.N.A.,
the blood is running either in the veins.
Kissing with forked tongues, confessing love like a reptile.
Meet Allegory Gator, and notice his smile.
Trust him as you would a crocodile.
What are a chameleon's true colors?
Note ye, all ye young lovers...

## *Some questions shouldn't be asked...*

When I ask my sister how she would kill her husband
she says: "Mushrooms"
with a definitive nod
as if she had already
settled that matter.
"Enokies--
small, white, plump
as babies' toes.
Smothered in garlic,

drowned in cream,
he would never taste
the Amanitas.
I would spoon-feed him."

## *The Icestorm*

telling liquid lies
with her atrophied tongue,
she bats those frozen eyelashes.
there used to be a heat wave
somewhere inside

Tuesday's child
wishes it were Friday
wishes for a glass of wine
instead of lukewarm concentrate
waits for the good days
to outweigh the bad
someday she'll find
her purple marble bag

picking at the nail polish
that was already
faded and chipped
flakes of it fall
to the linoleum floor
on her new fuchsia skirt
flakes of something
that could have been
but never was

a stray fleck of glitter
resting in the grooves
on her arm
tells the story quite candidly
and yet ever so
quietly
a silent scream
glistens in the light

and something
that should never have been
but somehow was
lurks in that ice storm inside
slithers
the frozen butterflies
and petrified ladybugs
King Midas
with a nouvea approach
to riches and pride

"let my eyes equal gold..."
and he turns it all to stone

## *Under the Gazebo*

We are all men here.
Fat cigars stuffed with
knowledge-
the stench
of this wide open air.
The children who pass
are stunned in their tracks

tripped sober
by education,
martinis
and laughs
dropped like marbles and baubles
spilling down the stone path...
I don't trust you, friend.
You'd put an eye out with
an educated guess,
cut me with definition,
chisel me into ornament...
beautiful, well-defined.
What a painful passage
through this arch, curved
but misleading
because
we are all men here.
We brave the second-hand smoke
and choke the garden out.

I don't wanna be a man.

*Julie Purzycki is a second year student at the Mount. She is majoring in English.*

## *Creador*

Soñe que me encontré contigo
Y al mirar tús ojos,
Noté que tú dormías

Te besé,
Envolviendote así
En el sueño mío
En un sueño sin lógica,
En un sueño sin olvido,
Cuando el tiempo no nacía
En un yo sin tí,
En un tú sin mí
Cuando la eternidad aun no existía

Y nació una luna
Y nació un sol
Y nació un nuevo mundo
Al latir un corazón

Una voz se escuchó en el infinito
Sin labios ni oídos
Una voz y un latido
Fuíste tú o quizas fui yo

Retrocedí a mirar
Los ojos que dormían
Un sueño
Al cual ya no pertenecía

*Rocio Ramirez is a second year student at the Mount. She is studing Business Administration.*

# Florentina Rosales

## *Nonsense*

Rain beats down on
a weathered rock.
Thunder socks
the mysterious sky.
To say and sigh,
to hate and love,

is to find fate
knocking at the door.
Mud floods the floor,
clouds sud the sky.
Soft, dry, hands touch
his throat as he

stares directly
into my sharp,
red, bruising eyes.
Surprise me and
cut away the
cool, blue stray kiss.

*Florentina Rosales is a fourth year student at the Mount. She is graduating this May with a Liberal Studies major.*

Midnight Runs in the Garden of Blue Evil

At night when there are no children free to ruin,
laughter is heard among the blue roses in the garden.
Great big laughs of hunger and hollering pain,
my eyes cut across the bushes.
They look for an endless frog train.
Strike out the band, clap, play the guitar,

jump both feet in the air.
Roll red leather pieces of his throat.
To curve a rock around soft pink petals,
lift your arms and hug a kettle.
Bodies lie in tamarack bushes, bones splintered.
Sharp white stands out against blood purple, earth red brown.

Slag rushes from my mouth,
drips down my shirt and hides in my flannel.
Saliva makes its way down soft, blue designer jeans
pools above curved pelvic bones.
Planned intervention of mechanical hands kisses my pelvis.
All ends.

White Chicken Love

Love is a white plucked chicken
thrown spread-eagled on the dinner table.
In wait of the butcher knife,
you stand near the altar.
Your mother holds her breath and your hand.
Do you see me? I wonder

Is the mirage of me whom you marry today?
Or does the frozen honey of your eyes
penetrate my erratic wonder of white,

to be served among red flower petals
at tonight's conception.
My feet move beside each other,

constant fungus companions,
similar to us. Beneath collective breaths,
family baits friends into Catholic confrontations.
Before the pulpit, bonny hands crackle with a twist
from a white chicken's neck. The butcher knife slides
as the priest blessed all assembled.

Jesus glared down from his stick,
screeched full-lunged at the congregation.
Extended his arms engulf.
Between us stand seas of wrecked battles,
and dead dragons with our names,
while lost puppies await the rain.

Adriana Serrano is a fourth year student at the Mount. She is graduating this May with a B.A. in Philosophy.

## *Question From Nod's People*

I wonder what we gain by being chaste,
Always alone in woods that never love,
Our lonely prayers to blossom on the waste,
To burgeon saintly whiteness in a dove.

Fowl, rend the heaven's gate to see his face,
Please seal the hallowed entrance with a spell,
Deny admission only to His Grace,
So He might live the sting of frigid hell.

But rage He twists into our epitaphs,
Could resolutions solidly inlaid,
And no sad pleas nor sacrifice of calves,
Prevents the grounding of the good enslaved.

His cause, encrypted, hopelessly entombed,
Stays safely sealed from those who slide from wombs.

*Alan Stauffer is a Mount student in the weekend college program. He is majoring in English.*

# Jessica Taylor

## *Seasons Don't Change*

I am destined to always wait
for you. Wet from tears and rain, I am
resigned forever to a lonely fate.

When buds abound past garden gate,
I stand alone outside, admiring.
I am destined to always wait.

The sun rises and I anticipate
your warmth, which will never come,
resigned forever to a lonely fate.

My heart, for leaves an autumnal mate,
falls on cold ground, unfulfilled.
I am destined to always wait.

Snow falls; the season is late.
Still I linger with dwindling hope,
resigned forever to a lonely fate.

A new day comes, insignificant date.
You'll never come; you don't exist.
I am destined to always wait,
resigned forever to a lonely fate.

*Jessica Taylor is a senior graduating in May with a BA in Liberal Studies and minor in English. She plans to teach elementary school and possibly (someday) High school English. Her hobbies and interests are reading and spending time with friends. She was previously published in the spring 99 Mount Voices.*

## *Vansant's Inferno*

You steer along the steep, confining bluffs
  mindful of mass and velocity, watching for the headlamps
of the heavy hauler who rules this coiled path of asphalt
  by default. You are Old Roy's afterthought
when he is fully loaded with his tonnage:
  physics dictates what he can and cannot do
        to minimize the danger.

Tonight, the sleepy midnight motorist
  is only rolling through, a stranger
to this place of noonday shadow
  and the Pentacostal hum;
the crackling apoplexy of Apocalypse
jangles from behind the backlit dash.
Very near, in the here and now,
  pale eyes set in the blackened faces
blink at the end of four-to-twelve
  blinded by what ragged swath of stars
the hollow mountains will admit,
  stray chirp of nightbird stifled
by the phantom highwall ring.
  Fossil fumes have mortified the sinuses;
noses numb to bitter incense
  wafting up and down the drainage of the Slate
from burning blooms atop coke ovens
  brooding in the gloomy roadside hollow
    known as Jewell.

O happy shades, disperse for bed!
  The hoot-owl shift has come to plum the dark
    and fetch more fuel.

## *Fallen*

November is the first harsh test of love.
It seals from the sun; equivocates to the moon.
It clips the chatterer's teeth, floods the wheezing lungs
of cursing, coatless bums unsteadied by the whitening wind.

Upon the dawning of this dull, black-hatted month
a ghostly dancer sank beneath the pumpkin patch
to dream upon a bed of clammy, bird-spack chert.
The sound box of an unstrung fiddle props his chalky head,
now drowsing in the prepossessing numbness of the dead.
We sullen breathers cannot stop to sleep;
we are compelled to climb the steep, short days
into the length dark.

Weeks will pass before the lights are strung,
before the springs of evergreen, of clove and orange
steaming in the cheerful cups.
Our hearts will be as innocent as kindling
on the night we say our prayers beside the hearth
and contemplate the holy odors of the barn.

For now, what's by these cold, infertile rains
is what remains: the sickly inclinations
are inclined to come to harm.
Only the cunning lovers keep love warm.

*George Alan Thwaites is a poet from Kingsport, Tennessee.*

## *(untitled)*

The clouds grew thick,
The wind was cool,
Wavering pools moved
And the dew was thin.
It hugged my skin
Like a soft cloth

The rain then came,
Sharp drops kissed my eyes,
And I just cried.
I missed the mud that gave me pleasure.
It ruined leather,
It bruised rocks.

The blue waves crashed,
They were a surprise to see
Then destiny snuck up on me.
He bit my hand,
I spilled my tea,
He grabbed my throat and I couldn't breathe.

*Lindsey Beth Truman is a sophomore pursuing an English major and a Music Performance minor. She is Secretary and Treasurer for the Muses and is Copy Editor of The Oracle. She enjoys playing the flute, writing poetry, sketching, art history, hanging out with her friends, and searching the earth for other kindred spirits.*

Dear lover please send me a blue sheet of paper
with the blood from the frog that ruined our floor.
Crinkle it neatly as you would an umbrella,
or a hug or whatever. Then dear burn the edges
'til they burn bright with rage, burn every last page
with those words and those hates—

My wavering eyes say that love's door's ajar,
a cool cloud of breath lingers in twilight.
Fingers of night from our tamarack's boughs
slant, suspending the owner between inside and out
and singing sweet laughter that shivers each strand
Don't dare to disturb him—

We dance on the moon, you bend, kiss my throat
and pull from your pocket that soft blaze of pyre.
Ruin the red leather sash 'round the jar
draw from your lips and down to your digits
the power to write on that blue piece of paper
the words of forever and always, I—

*Leora M. West is a senior pursuing an English major. She loves the spoken word, tulips, and the color gray.*

# Prose

## *Edible Makeup*

Mother and I walk through the shiny store. For college, you see. For the last things she will buy me. (Probably not, but she thinks so.)
She puts things like store-brand toothpaste, shiny pink soap the color of seashells (it's on sale,) and panty hose in egg cartons in the metal cart that refuses to go the way I want it to. Its skinny legs go

This way

But I want it to go

That way.

But when her back is turned, I sneak in Oreo's with double thick creme that looks like packed snow, fuzzy soda that makes me burp, and a cheap compact called

"Irish Creme."

It makes me think. That's not really the color of my skin. Mine would be more like

"Malaria," or "Old Cheese."

I'm more yellow. But I like, admire the color I hold in my hands. It is a deep rich ivory, the color I imagine in the pure white gleam of an elephant's crafted tusk. It is the delicate color of china that only the best guests can leave their lipstick marks on. "Irish Creme" - I wonder if it is edible. It sounds too good to only put on your face to hide that red zit. I clutch the color to my chest. Then I remember Mother. But, it's okay, she is looking at shampoos to make my hair smell good so that I can have a nice

Korean

boyfriend, and not the

one I have. I move down the aisle and see eyeliner. A line for the eye. I don't have that crease on my eyelids that either separates or joins you until you die. I have heard the term hooded for mine. But that makes me think of sweatshirts. Criminals that do time. I don't want to be known as a sweatshirt. I pick out

"Black Olive" eyeliner

to make a crease.

Then I see her hand. It's quicker than a butterfly's wings as it slaps up and down lightly on my wrist as if it were never there. I know the frown of Mother's without seeing it. The wrinkles, the whole bit. The twin rivers in her cheeks, where tears sometimes leak. There would be laugh lines around her eyes if she wasn't frowning.

I look. Her eyes narrow on the edible makeup. They become crescent half-moons, settling in her own sky of thunderous thoughts. She doesn't like the makeup. No...it's not the makeup, its the

Color.

"What?" she screams. "You not ivory. Too pale for skin!" Her voice is loud in the crowd of the supermarket. People stare at her eccentric cluster of clothes, and rows of shoppers move away from her.

I am annoyed. "So?" I say. She is puffed up like a peacock. - like she knows everything. "So find color for you." We march through a curious mass, who are probably thinking poor lass. I think that too. But I follow my mother. I feel like a sheep being led by a shepherd. She picks almost immediately:

"Creamy Butterscotch."

She hands me the compact.

and for one second, our eyes meet and there is

Common ground.

We are embarrassed and smile. I take the color and it is perfect. Butterscotch is my favorite candy flavor. But I still need the

Olive liner.

And Mother doesn't say anything about that, for there is nothing to say. Well, there is plenty to say, but she doesn't know the words in

English,

And I wouldn't understand if she tried in

Korean.

So we carry our cart of mixed items and wait in line.

*Julie Ahn is a student at Mount St. Mary's. She also writes for* The Oracle, *the student newspaper.*

## *No Small Wish*

It was a sweltering, blistering summer day in the Mojave Desert. There was no electricity at the isolated Pleasant Pastures trailer park. No power. No fans. No air-conditioning. No television. No ice. No comfort.

Little five-year-old Linda pressed her nose against the screen door and sniffed the hot dry air. It smelled of dust and burned the inside of her nose. She sneezed. She rubbed her grid-marked nose and turned to her mother who had wearily melted into the tattered brown sofa.

"Mommy, can we go to the beach? Please!"

Her mother remained motionless, but opened her eyes and replied heavily

"Linda, Baby, I wish you would quit asking when you already know we can't."

Linda rubbed her nose again and reached for the cherry flavored Kool-aide her mother made for her. She took a gulp. It was her favorite flavor, but it was warm. She drank it anyway.

Linda was wearing her bathing suit. It was ice blue with pictures of pretty fish all over. It was one of the better hand-me-down items from Cousin Amber last year, but Linda wasn't big enough to wear it then. Mommy promised her that she would buy her a new bathing suit when she grew out of this one. Linda hoped she wouldn't grow anymore. She liked the pictures of the fish.

Linda brought some Kool-aide to Mommy in her own favorite blue Tupperware cup. Mommy clumsily sat up and smiled wearily.

"Thank you Sweetheart! Maybe we can go to the beach tomorrow, okay?"

"Mommy, I'm hot nowww! Please! Can we go today?"

"You already know that we can't. The Datsun isn't running. Daddy is going to work on it when he comes home tonight."

Linda scrunched her face into an exaggerated pout. She was overheated and starting to get cranky. She trudged to her spot at the door, sat down, and pushed her nose back into the screen.

"I want to go to the beach. I want to go to the beach. I want to go to the beach. I want to go..."

Her mother sat on the sofa and listened helplessly. She wanted so much more for her growing family than she had to offer. Linda's chanting fell into a mumble.

"Linda, baby, I think it's time for a nap."

"I don't want a nap. I want to go to the beach. I want to go to the beach. I want..." Her mumbling became softer, but determined.

The windows of the mobile were open, but there was no breeze to blow away the stagnant, dry, suffocating air. Mommy picked herself up from the sofa and ambled to the kitchen. She grabbed a clean towel and ran it under the faucet. When the towel was drenched, she brought it to Linda. Mommy sat down next to her little girl and lovingly cooled her face, arms, shoulders, and legs with the wet cloth. Linda gently leaned against Mommy's round body and closed her eyes while her mother looked out the door into desolation.

*Joanna Capazzi is a Junior double majoring in English and Business.*

## *Mi último día*

Todo está bajo control. Mis ojos maravillados se perdían en la belleza del paisaje frente a ellos. Los rayos del sol que durante el día habían sido flamantes, caían débiles entre las nubes y dejaban lugar para la fresca brisa que anunciaba la noche. El día se terminaba. En mi alma reinaba una paz inigual. Mis labios dejaban escapar una mínima sonrisa al recordar que pisaba mi tierra. La tierra que tanto quería. La tierra donde pronto me reuniría con mis padres.

Poco a poco el sol fue ocultando dejando atrás la misteriosa obscuridad. Me volví a mirar a mi marido quien serenamente llevaba el control del volante. La camisa verde que llevaba le resaltaba el color moreno de su piel que yo tanto admiraba. Me acerqué hacia él y como tantas veces lo había hecho, me recosté en su musculoso hombro. Esta, sin embargo, parecía la primera vez. Él desprendió una de sus manos del volante, y suavemente acarició mi frente. El roce de su mano con mi piel me hizo estremecer. Depués de dos años de matrimonio, sus manos aún tenían ese hechizo mágico que me volvió loca la primera vez que me tocaron. Siguió acariciando mi cara. Al voltear, sus ojos quedaron íntimamente ligados a los míos y perdidos en el paraíso mismo, nos acercamos sin notarlo. Nuestros labios se correspondieron en un beso improviso, un beso de amor.

Estábamos juntos...nada más importaba.

De repente, nuestro paraíso se desvaneció. Espiré un air que me quemaba por dentro. Luego, una olada fría cubrió mi cuerpo. Sin enetender lo que pasaba sentí un miedo enorme. Comencé a temblar. Poco a poco el frío me llegó hasta los huesos. Las venas me dolían mientras la sangre intentaba abrirse paso. Una desconocida se acercaba. Su cabello café ondulado le caía perfectamente hacia la cintura. Vestía de blanco. Estaba cerca. Sus ojos negros buscaban los míos. Su mirada era compasiva y misericordiosa. En realidad era hermosa.

Me dió la impresión que yo estaba tirada en el piso. Ella se acercó y me ofreció su mano. La extendió cuan madre que salva a su niña. Sin pensario le extendí la mía. El rozo de nuestra piel la reconocí. Sentí escalofríos. Mil navajas atacaron a mi cuerpo. Tenía mucho frío. Sentí dolor, miedo, sobre todo, sentí una inmensa soledad. Me ayudó a levantarme, y al hacerlo vi a mi cuerpo tirado.

Compredí lo que pasó...

Me acerqué a el para tocarlo. Estaba un poco caliente aún. Luego, vi a mi marido sangrando y arrastrandose a lo que quedaba de mí. Con locura besó la que habían sido mis labios. Deseperadamente lloraba y me suplicaba no lo dejara. Me hizo miles de promesas y se disculpó por no haber tenido cuidado. Me juró que me quería. Desesperadamente me sacudía y pedía que reaccionara. Yo lo abracé pero él no me sintió. Le dí mil besos. Él me beso de nuevo. Le pedí perdón. Él dejó caer su cuerpo junto al mío.

Intenté huir. Regresar el tiempo. Volver el alma a mi cuerpo. Todo fue inútil. Mi alma se alejaba con aquella esbelta figura fría.

*Alma Castillo is a fourth year student at the Mount.*
*She is graduating this May with a degree in Liberal Studies.*

## *little faith*

The Lord my God is a fierce God, exacting. He is a firm Father, strict and quite clear in his instruction. He leaves no room for question. As with His love, so it is with direction. And He knows, better, of course, than any other that I am moved by His hand; indeed, that my own hands are moved by His will. Yes. I am His agent, of that there is no doubt. Some would say that my actions are evil, that I myself am an evil man. But I am not. It makes little difference; even if it were so, I would be no less my Father's son. It is forever His will, not mine.
And I tell myself this, many times daily, as I sit here and watch you all walk back and forth before this bench. And as you walk I always ask myself: is that, could that be her? Might she be the one? But, all wondering aside, I know that God would, will, I know, deliver this one sign clear and doubtless, and there will be no need to interpret complex symbols. Still, I wonder a moment, a natural, quizzical man, but once that has passed, I sit. And I wait; for you.

You are on your way somewhere and I am here when you pass the bench. Perhaps you notice my glance; more likely, not. In any case, the feeling is strong enough to make me follow you a while. I size you up, commit your step to memory; I have learned that cadence can speak volumes. I take note of the way the wind catches your chin, how you turn your head towards or away from light, depending on its brilliance. In the grocery I make a mental list of what you buy. His are mysterious ways indeed. You can never be sure when some important sign, an omen, will be revealed. I must be ever vigilant, for God could choose to scream significance into the moment your fingertips close around a can of tuna, or some such thing. And so, with as much stealth as I've been blessed with, I sit and watch you sleep, careful not to wake you.
I watch your body jerk with quick, sudden, and strikingly violent dream spasms. Your eyes scramble under closed lids. You open and then clench tight your hands. Head snaps from right side to left. I, I myself don't sleep.

For days I track your movements. You are, thankfully, a creature of habit. You don't see me in the mornings at the café where you drink your three, no more, no less, cups of coffee; where you read the paper, discarding the sports news, from the Life section backwards to the front

page; where you lick the excess cream cheese, in one fluid motion, from the circumference of your onion bagel. And you allow yourself the one cigarette, the after-bagel, one and only cigarette of the day, relishing it with your third, and final, cup of coffee. A packet of Equal, and a splash of cream.

You seem to be quite happy in your job. You always smile as you walk in to the flower shop; you pet the cat and kiss Ms. Givens on the cheek. I know her name from our conversation about you the other day. She is very giving. I now know, for example, that you've lived in this town your whole life, but as far as she can tell, you are always alone. She worries about you.

Sweet woman.

As the morning progresses, I am further amazed by the trance you assume while arranging flowers. I myself have never been very good with meditation, active or otherwise. But you, you become more focused with every stem you've placed just so. Each and every movement, every finger bent, draws you closer to God. With hardly any effort at all. Your eyes glaze over some; I bet you've never even realized. I have. I long for that sort of peace.

Those of us whom God has anointed as soldiers, men of action, we don't know much about His peace. We know His strength and His drive; His unfailing attention to detail; His Plan. And we, well, I know I feel His love coating me. He is all that stands between me and things too horrific to mention. He is my shield, my rod and my staff. So, it is with great joy that I do whatever He wishes of me. But there is no peace; not of the sort I watch you display, unknowing, day after day, for weeks now.

Part of me has come to love the way you tie your shoes. The snug ones, nearly Victorian, that come midway up your calf. Thin black laces, woven; you tie very tight knots; your knuckles whiten. There was that one time, when you braced your foot on the third step up to St. John's, knee fully crooked. Neither leg seemed to be supporting you; neither held your weight. I could almost swear that you were hovering. It amazes me, really; such poise and non-effort, and at the same time, always, the knuckles are white.

You check your mailbox much too often. You begin hours before you know the mail will come; perhaps today it will be early? There is nothing, you knew that though. But, defiant, you cock your head, first down the street, towards where the mail would come from, and then, for the sake of certainty, in the other direction. Maybe someday the mail will be delivered backwards, but not today, it seems. You repeat

this every twenty minutes for hours the days you're not at work.

I eat now when you eat, you know. It would seem our cycles have meshed. Praise the Lord. The closer we become, the easier this will be; if necessary. Yesterday my eyes were but six inches from yours. At the phone booth; do you remember? Your eyes are the strangest blue I have ever seen. An electric ocean, with brownish red streaks, something golden about your stare.

At night now while you sleep, having watched you dream for long enough, I perform my ablutions. I crouch in the basement of your building and dig my fingernails into my flesh. The pain helps me to focus. Sometimes I might feel weakness, somewhere, say, in my ankle; there I dig first. When I draw blood, I drag my nails another inch or so. I sit with the pain, conscious of it, and then I release, moving to some other infirm spot on my body. I sing silent praises to the Most High and do as many push-ups as the Spirit will allow. And then the Lord's prayer; thirteen times; one for each apostle, disregarding Paul, of course, and paying the debt to Judas.

I suppose, if we were to speak, I would feel close enough to you by now to share with you my affinity for Judas. It would be obvious, I'm sure, if you knew me like I do you. We are kindred souls, he and I. He and I and all the countless others who work the dark strides of God's great plan. You probably wouldn't understand. No one hardly ever does. I always try to explain myself in the moments immediately prior to action. But then, as the Book says, there is great screaming, and much gnashing of teeth. And none of them have ever listened.
Night after night, you waste your precious God-given time; you sit and drink in that hole on the corner. What is it you are looking for? In not many hours, the night arrives and, ashamed and in a daze, you walk the walk of the wounded back to your house. You fumble with the keys, and I am almost inclined to step from the shadows and help you; you are so frail. But that wouldn't do any good at all. So instead I watch as you fumble and drop, kneel and stumble, and try again. You break my heart nightly.

In the past three months, you've been to church twice. Once was for confession, I know that, and I know the reason why. The second time was marked only by a beautiful, blue spring Sunday morning. I had so much hope for you that day.

Today you have called in sick. But you're not. You know that as well as I. I watch as you step from the shower, somehow powdery, and dry. You slip naked into a sundress; I am now long past averting my eyes to such things; I watch it carry quickly over your shoulders, catching

briefly on your breasts and hip. You slide your sunglasses onto your nose and, pausing to grab the straw bag with your sandwich, your lotion and your book from the table by the door, you head to the street and hail a cab.

You are at the beach all day. You burn easily; even I know that. But still, you sit in the glare of the afternoon sun, cooking yourself. You will blister and peel before nightfall. This is just another one of the things about you which, taken all together, are starting to make me angry. You punish yourself, do you know that? It' s not unlike vandalizing a temple. You don't even realize. How a person can be so unattached to their own self is beyond me. Truly, it is.

Today I knew you were headed to the bathroom a full minute before even you yourself realized it. We' re so close, you and I.

Sometimes, I'm at a loss as to how much time has passed; at others, I can catalog every minute. Some days, there is nothing but the moment. And tonight, there you are, at the end of the bar, sipping your scotch. Our eyes are locked, have been now for, oh, twelve minutes or so. You think you recognize me, but you don't. There isn't the faintest image of an idea in your head that this dark-haired man down the bar from you, one of a numberless mass, has been beside your every movement for these last ninety-seven and a half days. One broken second before my park bench and you became absolutely central to my existence. What are the chances of that? He does indeed, I always say, work in mysterious ways. Undeniably.

But can you, might you be the one? It is so difficult to tell. I've been waiting for the sign, the flaming sword, the burning bush. Nothing. Yes, it might be that God has become more subtle in his portents as we have grown up alongside Him, and a man these days must look very deep inside the mundane for divine guidance, but even subtly prodded, I can only be sure that you may be who I think you are. That perhaps- you are the one that God has chosen. I wish you were. If you were, there would be rest for me. There would be great reward; I would have fulfilled the Lord My God in every way. And I will, someday, sooner or later. I know that. And when all is said and done, I will have broken the last seal. On Earth as it is in Heaven. All praises due.

So you stand. You have that balance now, that poise you demonstrate while lacing your shoes. You walk towards me and sit beside me, set your drink down and keep it in a filamentary grasp, all fingertips and air. Turn those blue eyes on me; then close them. Breathe deep.

—I know you, don't I? you ask.

—Know me? I counter.

—Yeah. We've met before. Don't even try and tell me I'm wrong; I'm not. I never forget a face. Never. Ask anyone. We've met. Where?

—I don't think we have.

You slide your hand towards me, palm up, knuckles dragging and squeaking just the tiniest bit across the wood of the bar. Chloe, you say. Hard 'O'.

I take your hand. It has a chill to it. It is all but weightless in my own.

—Pleased to meet you Chloe, I say.

I almost kiss your knuckles, but stop just short.

—And you would be?

I smile. I would be, I say, whoever you want. It's up to you. You tell me.

And you laugh. Whoever you are, you say. It takes all sorts.

We talk for hours, you drinking, breaking down and having that second cigarette and then a third and fourth. I sip tiny endless sips off of my one glass of red wine. You open up to me. You tell me about your roommate, the hell she puts you through, without realizing that I know you lie. You live alone. You tell me what you should be doing with your life; the stark contrast of what you actually are doing. I learn new things, about your mother, her love of gardening, You talk about your youth, of being an only child. You tell me how, when your father left, he burned down the house you lived in, carrying you through the flames to the street, where your mother stood, wrapped in shock and blankets. You never saw him again. You tell this story without tears. It is all so real, so close, that for the briefest second I can't recall just how long we've been married. What God has brought together, let no man tear asunder.

I never do mention my feelings for Judas.

And you say:

—God this is weird. I feel like I've known you my entire life.

—Yes, I say, I know exactly what you mean.

And you lay your hand on my thigh. I can feel the heat of your palm through my pant leg.

—Let's go for a walk, you say.

I pay your tab and we leave. The night is balmy. There is a haze in the air more felt than seen. I hold your hand and we walk towards the park. Where we first met.

—It's dark tonight, you tell me.

—No moon, I explain.

You say you've always been afraid of the nighttime. Ever since you were a child. Not the dark, but the night. You've never been entirely certain that morning will come. Never quite sure that the night will end.

—Don't you think that's silly? you ask me.

—No, it isn't silly at all. Everyone has their fears. Who's to say they need to be rational?

—Oh, this is rational alright. There's a reason for it. You see, after my father left, I came down with something, and I was sick, really sick, for weeks. We were staying with my grandmother then. I was so ill I was laid up in bed all day and all night. Didn't have the strength to make it to the living room. If I'd have been any older, I probably would have been scared that I was going to die. But I was just a little girl, I didn't know any better.

—What was it?

—Oh, grief, I'm sure, but it felt like the flu; fever, aches, pain—the whole thing. And every day, it was the same. Actually, worse each day for a while. Like it was never going to go away. After about three weeks, I woke up in the morning feeling almost well. I lay in bed awhile, with my eyes closed, hoping it was over, y'know? My head didn't ache, there weren't any chills. Thought that maybe, just maybe, that was the end of it. I remember it had snowed the night before. I figured that if I didn't have a fever, my mom would let me get out in it and play. If only for a little while. Do you remember how important it used to be to get out in the snow?

—There wasn't much snow where I grew up.

—Well, it was about the greatest thing that could happen as far as I was concerned. So, I feel okay, and I'm ready to run to the window, to look outside, to catch that first glimpse of all that beautiful whiteness. And I open my eyes and I can't see a thing. Not a thing, can you imagine? I could hear my grandmother downstairs in the kitchen, the water running, the radiators hissing, I could even hear my own heart thumping. But I couldn't see a thing. I mean, my eyes were open, wide open, but I couldn't see. I screamed. My grandmother came running—I heard her steps heavy on the floor, she was a big woman, pounding. I'm screaming: I'm blind, I'm blind! She fell into the bed, threw her arms around me, hushing, kissing my forehead. Grandma's here, baby, shhhh, Grandma's here. I'm blind! I tell her. My eyes were wide open. I knew it because I could feel the air on them, could feel the tears. But I couldn't see.

—My God, I say, closing my hand tighter around yours.

—I can't even tell you how frightened I was. I've never been so scared in all my life.

—I can only imagine.

—No, you can't.

You drop your head and walk on, tugging at me to catch up.

—What happened? I ask.

—Well, there were doctors, doctors every day. Whatever it was that I was sick with had gone, but now I was blind. So we went to doctor after doctor, trying to find out what had happened. There was talk of scarlet fever, pneumonia, all kinds of things. They ran one test after another, threw up their hands, and we'd move on to the next one. You see, I was healthy. Just blind. For no reason. I'll tell you, to this day, I can't step foot in a doctor's office. No matter how sick . . . you know that smell? That kind of hyper-clean, medicinal smell?

I nod.

—Well, it turns my stomach. Brings me chills. I get palpitations.

You stop, drop my hand and turn to look me in the eye.

—And not one of those doctors could find a damn thing. I thought I'd be blind forever. All those tests and they couldn't see anything.

You chuckle.

—But then they started praying. The both of them, Mom and Grandma, lighting candles and on their knees, praying, for days on end. Finally, some shrink they brought in decided it was hysterical blindness, completely psychosomatic, and that it would pass. Said it like I had the chicken pox. My mother screamed, and then she cried. I cried, Grandma too. About a week later, sure enough, he was right. The living room came, first shapes and fuzz, then just like it was. The TV console, the plastic covers on the sofa and chairs, the standing lamp with the pull-chain and the fringed shade. I called out to my Mom, I can see, y'know? And she and Grandma came running. My mother nearly collapsed. My grandmother shouting, Thank you, thank you, thank you Lord! and things like that. They went on and on about prayers answered, the love of God, my Mother was shaking, crying, hyperventilating; all I know is that I was just glad to be able to see.

—Sometimes prayer can do wonders.

—Yeah, guess so. Guess I'm a walking miracle. Touched by God and all that.

—Don't joke like that. You can see, can't you?

—Yes. I can. But ever since, I'm so scared to wake up. I'll lay in bed every morning, with my eyes clenched, scared to hell that I'll open my eyes and it'll be black. Night forever. Can you believe that? A grown

woman, scared to wake up. Afraid there'll never be a morning again.

—All it takes is a little faith, I say. Just the smallest bit.

You reach up to my face, gently slide the tip of your thumb along my cheekbone.

—You're a beautiful man, you know.

And then your lips are upon me. The shock of your kiss throws me. A part of me, an older part sure, a self of many years long gone, but not an insignificant self, screams: Jezebel! and pushes you away. But that is not my body. I give in to your kiss. I feel myself dissipate; I pour into you; the night becomes purple, lush. We kiss for hours, years, until the end of all time. My arms are wrapped tight around you.

It was easier before. In those days I would have simply snapped your neck by now. Fornicators, adulterers, baby-killers, Sodomites. There was a certain blissful simplicity to meting out divine justice that way. It was easy, satisfying. It was work of merit. Now, things are so much more complex. Every move I make is filthy with awesome consequence. My role now is so large it frightens me to think of it.
It will be by my hand, His will, of course, but by my hand, that the Mother of God will be taken. Before the fact. It will be my action that seals the fate of this world. It will be I who takes away the last very chance for salvation, I that clears the way for a cleansing of the world so complete that there will be nothing but a fresh and blank slate upon which the new Word will be written. Sodom, Gomorrah, the Deluge; they will all be insignificant in the wake of my deed. And only God and I will know what I've done. There will be no one to record this Gospel; it will forever be the greatest story never told. The truth of it weighs heavy like chains, the heaviness of a crossbar of wood on my shoulders. And on top of all that, you are kissing me.

You say we should go to your place and I agree. I am somewhat shocked, honestly. This seems very out of character. In all the nights I've watched you, you 've always come home alone. But tonight, I go with you. Almost I show my hand, almost I lead you to your own building. I think better of it, though, and let you guide me to your door.

Quick and sharp the thought comes that perhaps I have been duped. Could this be a test? Temptation comes to the strongest of men. The wilderness is a place of uncertainty; The Lord tests us, Satan tempts. The difficulty lies in deciphering the events around yourself; understanding from where it is they come; deciding which step is yours to take. I become very aware of your throat, open and exposed; one flash of my hand and I could crush all hope of breath from you; set you free.

But I have not been sent to crush temptation. It's not my lot. It couldn't be. I am hardly a perfect man. I sin a great deal. Temptation is as much a part of my existence as is the sun or rain, as is the gentle shift from night to day. You have your keys in your hand when we climb the steps to your door. You fumble with clumsy drunken fingers, your keys crash to the ground. I kneel at your feet, scoop the keys into my hand. Which one? I ask.

—The curvy one, you say.

I know which key to use. I unlock the door and hold it open for you. We climb the steps together; the house is split into two apartments, yours upstairs and the old man's below. He and his cats. I unlock the door to your apartment and we go inside. It is a short trip to the bedroom, shorter still to the bed. We are naked soon; we become an expanse of flesh, a shifting ocean. Not once do you acknowledge my scars. Waves of pleasure are broken by that younger me, in shabbier clothes, emerging from the back of my mind, screaming: Fornicator! Fornicator! I can just see my fingers lacing tight around your throat; the quick and sudden look of surprise and recognition on your face. You dust your fingertips across my chest. I close my eyes, clench my jaw.

Kosher butchers kill with such deft precision that the act could hardly be called slaughter. In a tiny shard of a second the animal is killed; there is death even before realization. Mercy is central to the act. For more years of my life than I can accurately count, I have aspired to that sort of mercy. What God has demanded of me is hard enough; to bear the slow pain of others, well, that would be just too much. I tried to refine my skills, to bring the lamb to slaughter purring.

But in the here and now, I flow with you, seeing bits and pieces of your childhood flash before my closed eyes; you're rolling around in a field of short white flowers; your mother lightly touches the nape of your neck. You cry in the corner of your bedroom, a photograph of your father clutched in your fist, salty tears seeping between your lips. You scream in the darkness. I see you now, a woman, slide a rose, just so, into a nest of Angel's Breath. Your breath comes in short staccato stabs in the dark. You bite your lower lip; a tear crawls gingerly from your left eye. I watch it build speed and plummet from your cheekbone. I push harder, looking for a place to rest up ahead. This goes on for hours.

You fall asleep with your hand cupping my jugular. I wait now for the voice of God, for the chastisement, the scorn. But there is none this time. Surely by now He would have voiced His will; surely by now, as

close as we are, I'd know. I tilt my head to look at you, the slightest bit of a grin to your mouth. Suddenly it is clear: whether you'd been sent by God or the Devil, I couldn't ever hope to know. To think otherwise is simply pride, decadence. There is still the lingering scent of the flower shop upon you, beyond the smoke and liquor, beyond the smell of sex and sweat; incense, centuries thick, coating the walls of a church.
I shift out from beneath your arm and stand to consider you, the room, the scene. Perhaps I will be cut down for this; the migraines could return all claws and knives. This could have been the doorway to the plague. As I say these words, only God knows, a cancer could be feeding on me. The consequences of a misstep on this road can be painful, deadly. The sheet, white linen, perfectly captures your frame, draped, as it is, across you. You are breathing strong, soft, fluid breaths. It seems as though tonight you breathe in circles, and for some reason, I see this as a good thing.

I slip back into my clothes; pants, shirt, shoes. When I lift my jacket from the chair, the weight of the knife in the inner pocket strikes me. I must be tired. The sound of your breathing permeates the room; it is calming to me, the sound of waves crashing gently on a beach somewhere. The sand beneath my feet is warm and giving, cushions my every step. The sun is just now setting below the tree line. The sky is a queer shade of purple; a neon bruise. I can see God's Eyes take shape in the midst of the purple; kind eyes, deep eyes. The water is warm too, as it scatters across my toes. I watch it as it scrambles back to rejoin the ocean. There is the sound of gulls off in the distance, the smell of salt in the air. I shake my head.

You're not the one. The clarity astounds me. I lower myself to my knees and give praises. I say things I do not understand. There are chariots and stars falling from the sky. Long chains of numbers run tickertape across my field of vision. Trumpets sound. I can see quite clearly a thief in the night. Oh Lord, You show me visions worthy of Revelations before I stand again. I am certain that it would be blasphemy to speak them aloud. I am down the stairs and into the street. The sun is breaking the horizon down at the foot of the avenue, the air is cool. The occasional truck rolls by as the buildings begin to blush. The streets seem washed; it must have rained during the night. Yes, it smells like rain. I turn and walk west, towards the park. It is nothing but a beautiful morning.

*Mitch Cohen is a recent graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop.*

## *Dirty White*

She knows this much is true: it is her husband's fault that she is pregnant with her lover's child. Or, she should say, it is mostly Harris' fault and she is almost certain David got her pregnant. Of course nothing can be said with absolute certainty anymore, Sara decides, lying on David's couch in his South Street studio apartment. David stands a few feet away, stir-frying their dinner while Sara rubs her stomach and listens to David's new CD. It hurts her ears, this CD called Philadelphia Noise Machine. A fitting name, Sara thinks. Yet when David looks over to gauge her reaction, she nods her head and smiles at him with the look she uses to say 'interesting.'

It is past ten o'clock already. She wishes he would turn around less and cook more. Not that she is even hungry really, but at this rate, it will be close to eleven before they eat, maybe even later than that. Sara is almost getting used to that with David, this belated schedule in which days begin at noon and fade out sometime after three AM. She can't help but worry, though, that these weird hours may be unhealthy for a baby. But, she wonders, isn't it arbitrary to consider these later hours the weird ones? David thinks so. He thinks this is the only time the world is vulnerable enough to live in. And watching him stand there in just a pair of faded jeans, playing with curry spices against the backdrop of his kitchenette, Sara decides that, just maybe, she agrees.

It is almost funny when she thinks about it, how different David is from Harris. They are both twenty-seven, four years older than she, but any similarity between the men ends there. The way they look, the way they carry themselves is opposite. David slouches casually beneath his long, curly blond locks, his five o'clock shadow. Harris looks as though he is still attending the Citadel, always standing at attention, sporting his crew cut and tucked-in tops. Before moving up north, before meeting David, Sara had no idea just how different twenty-seven could look.

A loud knocking on the front door interrupts her thoughts. David stops stirring their dinner long enough to head for the door. Sara lets out a sigh, knowing that whichever one of his friends is on the other side, it will only delay their meal that much longer. She doesn't know why she is this irritable around David, this impatient. David is mostly unaware of it, but in her head she wages so many wars over things she would never think of twice with Harris. Like his friends coming over

late, like the way he winks at her when he walks toward the door.

Hearing her sigh, he stops before turning the doorknob and asks, "Should I ignore it?"

"Go ahead," she waves at him. After all, maybe it's not one of his friends. Maybe, as she can't help but hope, it is someone else entirely. But Harris has his internship at the hospital tonight. He won't be getting home until midnight, let alone coming over here. She has another few hours until that will happen. She has another few hours at least.

Closing her eyes, she moves her hand over her belly, rubbing her bellybutton, pushing it in and out. She should really discuss this with David, this potential being inside of her, comprised of his blood. But what can David honestly say in response? That the two of them will make their relationship work, provide a home for this child? Even if David wants to try such a thing and they somehow make it through the pregnancy, they will be together three times longer than they have made it so far. Such a promise requires more imagination than faith. Well on her way out of faith, Sara isn't altogether anxious to let imagination go too. It is too much to lose all at once. And anyway, the person she really should discuss this baby with is Harris, her husband, who she has shared almost her whole life with, who has witnessed both sides of her own youth. Twenty-three years ago when she was born, Harris was there, standing next to her brother Jason, Harris' best friend since their birth. A picture captured the twosome smiling, the most important men in her life, ready to welcome her into the world. Shouldn't he be the one here now, if she is preparing to welcome someone new?

David pulls open the door and a voice all too familiar hits the raucous room: "Where's my wife?"

Sara sits up quickly to make eye contact with her husband, the twisted version. His button-down shirt falls helplessly out of his khakis, his sweater is on inside out.

"Sara..." Harris says, pushing past David and heading to the foot of the couch. Sweat drips down both sides of his face, despite the evening chill he brought inside with him. She shivers against it as she adjusts her eyes to the unfamiliar picture of urgency before her. His torment is painted on his face so precisely that Sara can trace Harris finding David's love song left resting conspicuously on top of her open address book. She can trace him storming over here to claim her back as his own. His response may seem romantic or staggering or entirely implausible. But as surely as Sara knew he would respond this way, she knows it is none of those things. It is simply a soldier defending his

territory.

"You got off early?" she asks as if they are having the conversation in their own apartment.

"Get dressed," he says. Sara is wearing David's torn Temple University T-shirt, a pair of her pink silk underwear peeking out from underneath. She sees him take in the curly red hair falling out of its bun, her exposed neck, freckled back. "Now, Sara..."

She nods in response to her husband's demand, but doesn't make a move. Somewhere in the background, David quietly returns to the stove and his dinner preparations, adding more peanut sauce to the bean curd and vegetables. The newly peppered peanuts meet Sara's nose and she feels, at once, overcome by hunger.

"I said now," Harris repeats, gripping the arm of the couch so tightly his leg shakes.

She clears her throat and sits up closer to him, placing her hands so their wedding rings are aligned. "Is it cold out?"

He looks at her in disbelief, before letting go of the couch's arm and searching the length of the apartment. Sara watches the studio's pinks and yellows and greens painfully converge in her husband's eyes, watches him register the Coppola movie posters covering the walls, the mismatched rugs on the floor.

His eyes catch the khaki overcoat he bought for Sara last Christmas in the nearest corner. Harris reaches for the coat and wraps it around Sara's shoulders, tying the waistband tightly around her ribs.

"Put your arms through, please." Sara complies, dropping into the rough sleeves. "It's on?" he asks.

She nods.

"Okay then." He bends down to pick her up, as Sara has seen men do in the movies. She wonders if Harris thinks this will impress her. He knows how much she loves those old movies. Probably not, she decides. He probably just doesn't trust her to walk out the door on her own.

And still, as he holds her to his chest, she wraps her arms around his shoulders to make their walk to the front door easier. From where he stands cooking at the stove, David raises his stirring spoon long enough to wave and smile at her. She waves back behind her husband's shoulders, half-expecting Harris to drop her in the hallway's narrow floor and go back inside to put David in his place. But David has already returned to his cooking and Harris doesn't so much as look in his direction. He just carries his wife down the six soiled flights of stairs and into the late December night.

Once outside, he looks down Philadelphia's quieting South Street and then at the bundle in his arms, putting her on the ground. "We're going home," he says.

Home. Over this last year, he has contorted that word's meaning so badly that she can barely recognize the word on his tongue. And yet, the hope of it, well, that has stayed with Sara as closely as how this whole mess began.

*****

It was Christmas, a year ago that their problems started. It was their fourth married Christmas, the first they had spent away from Charleston, South Carolina where they grew up. They had moved to Philadelphia in August so Harris could attend University of Pennsylvania's Medical School. A few months after they arrived, Harris started changing how he acted toward Sara. At first it was little things. He stopped calling her from school, stopped telling her what time he'd be getting home at night. Then the times he came home began changing, began getting so late that it was a struggle to wait up for him. He avoided talking to her all together. It was such a cliché, Sara knew, that type of crisis, but it grew between them and she had little choice but to let it. So, alone in this Northern city, she watched her husband buy clothes that never mattered to him before, speak without the southern drawl he used to take pride in, look at her with sadness, almost pity. And, then, with equal patience, she pretended not to notice all the time he began spending with a Dermatology Resident from Manhattan named Hil. The one time she met her, Sara couldn't help but think that Hil looked like a Hil should, with long straightened hair, a don't-mess-with-me smile, a strong laugh. Sara could even understand her husband's fixation with Hil. It made perfect sense, really. Hil was everything Harris decided he should be.

Sara wasn't sure exactly when the two of them began sleeping together, maybe it had been months, but things got so out of control that Hil began calling the house last spring. Sara would give him the messages, just the same as his other messages, waiting for the day he would throw them out. Then, right before Halloween, David walked into the card shop where Sara worked. Sara spent the nicest morning in almost a year helping him find the perfect one. That's how she began her part, with someone who paid attention when Harris wouldn't. Only the attention didn't help as much as it hurt, when in the face of it, she still just wanted her husband to care, still wanted him to want her again.

So this morning, Sara left a song David had written about them- Brand New Freedom, David called it- on the floor near Harris' nightstand. David had said the song was more theoretical than literal. And though Sara wasn't exactly sure what that meant, the song still served its purpose. She enjoyed thinking about Harris looking at the strange music sheet, ridden with jealousy and fear. Thinking of him searching her address book for where he lived. It was time to make her husband worry a little and then work a little, for what Sara knew still mattered most to him. For what mattered most to him the first twenty-three years of her life. Because really it wasn't even that they were married for three years, but that they had been together for her whole life. He was her family for better or for worse and she was his. It was so cancerous a deed it scared her, but she needed to remind him that no matter what he decided he might want, she was the one thing he would always need. Sara supplied the bait that would make her husband come quickly to carry her back to their life, beginning to bury this hateful year beneath his panicked footsteps.

******

They drive down South Street passing Sara's card shop, a closing coffee shop, a pulsating Pontiac Grill. Sara sits as close to Harris as the car will allow, eagerly taking in the familiar smell coming from his sweater. It is a mixture of her perfume and the laundry detergent she uses. She leans in closer, happy that through this whole thing, through Hil and David, Sara's scent has managed to linger with him. The importance of his betrayal, of both of their betrayals dissolves in the inhalation of that type of permanence. Only, there is this baby, who Sara already loves, promising to threaten their certainty. A baby she didn't intentionally plan for and yet never made any effort to stop. The thought that somewhere inside she wanted this makes her tired. The thought that she didn't makes her even more tired. As Harris turns left off South Street, moving down Front and onto the small block where they live, her thoughts return to her baby and she remembers that the day is far from over. The year is still far from over.

Harris pulls the car in the front of their building, #6, on a street of ten. For a moment, Sara thinks he may leave her there, in the car, but Harris comes around to the passenger side and opens the door.

"I never want to talk about any of this. Okay, Sara? For us to be okay, we can never talk about it."

She steps out of their car. "Fine."

"One thing though. The lyrics talked about this being just beginning. That you two just started. Is that right? Did it..."

"Just," Sara answers too quickly. "Just."

She can feel his chest exhale against her as he nods. She knows it's easier for him to believe that she and David just began. And maybe it's easier for her to think of David that way too. Just someone to make her husband jealous, a momentary fixation, a short-lived lover. Just her child's father.

How can she begin to tell Harris this though? Today is meant to remind Harris where his loyalty should be, where his heart still lives in spite of himself. Today is meant to shock, not destroy. Sara isn't out to destroy. She isn't out for anything that might encourage Harris to put her down and close their door behind him. More than anything in her whole life, more than any uncertainty still sticking to her, Sara wants him to finish carrying her inside. Sara wants to end up on the same side of the door as her husband.

"Then it's over," he says, believing the words. "It's all past."

"Past," she agrees, nodding. "Completely past."

Even as the words leave her mouth, she can't believe she has agreed to such an offensive thing - this idea of making something past. The present is always trying to do that, trying to end a moment's power by proclaiming it as over. David before her moments ago, trying to pretend what she has done didn't matter to him. Harris before her now pretending David doesn't. The present wants nothing more than to sweep that past away and make room for what it believes to be a limitless future. Only, despite all the efforts to the contrary, the past sticks strongly in the form of endless secrets, potent memories, an unanticipated birth. Sara imagines the healthy way to deal with such things is to invite them into the present, but not let them control it. But to call these injuries past, to store them where they can't be revisited and broken down, where they live free-flowing in silence, that ensures the most biting heartache of all.

Harris pushes open their front door and carries Sara inside, resting her on their living room couch. It is floral, the couch, as is their one bedroom apartment. Simple, but pretty. Sara sewed the curtains with her own hands, Harris built their bookcase and entertainment system. It is theirs.

Harris leaves the room, returning a moment later with Sara's folded blanket, a creamy yellow thing that she rests under every evening. As he puts the blanket down, he leans in over his wife and removes her coat, hanging it on the back of their matching love seat. Touching the

side of her cheek with the back of his hand, he undoes her bun, letting her red curls fall over her shoulders. He lies down beside her, moving his hands down her body until they find the edge of her underwear, pulling them off slowly. Sara reaches for her husband to draw him nearer when a loud beeping from his waist interrupts the ceremony he performs as much for himself as for her.

"The hospital," he explains, as if she doesn't know. Standing up, Harris reaches for the blanket resting on the couch's edge. He shakes it out and places it first around the balls of Sara's feet, moving upward and wrapping his wife like a present. "I'll be right back," he says.

Harris heads for the kitchen. She waits as he dials and for the well-versed words, "yes, this is Cooper," before uncurling the blanket from around her and racing toward their bathroom and a drugstore pregnancy test she has hidden in the cupboard under their sink. Sara has avoided taking this test for days, but now, she feels, she can't soil it soon enough. Her urine stings as it fills the small stick, another sign, she is sure, that the result will be pink, not white. Ten small minutes and she'll know for sure the secret her changing body has already spilled to her. The precious stick in her hand, she walks back to the couch, re-wraps herself, and waits.

She can hear his confident voice in the next room, answering the questions of whoever is on the other line. Beneath the blanket, she moves her fate around, not daring to wish that either color will whirl out of it. Part of her will die whatever shade lives. That death will be mostly her husband's fault, Sara reminds herself. He is the one who interrupted their lives to demand a parade.

When he returns to the room from his phone call, he has tucked in his shirt. He sits softly on the edge of her blanket. "You okay?" he asks, pushing Sara's curls off of her face.

She opens her mouth to speak, to say 'not really' and then tell him the reasons why. Isn't such a devotion to truth supposed to set her free from this moment? Isn't that what keeps people from fragmenting, an unwavering respect for honesty? But looking at his smile, at how it curls in the corners to meet his eyes, how it wrinkles his chin, Sara realizes she had no intention of telling him anything that will make that smile disappear.

"Fine. Is everything all right at the hospital?"

He nods. "It's pretty quiet. Dr. Baker says I can just make up the hours next week."

"Good." The stick grows heavier in her hidden hand. It is like a dagger, this stick. She can take it out at any moment and stab him with

it. Right where his thick eyebrows part.

"Jason beeped in when I was on the phone."

"Did he?" She hates missing Jason's calls. Her brother, her most solid blessing. The part of Sara she knows Harris always loves.

"He's at your Mom's," he says, kissing her blanketed belly. "They'll call back in the morning."

She nods, trying to figure out how to get her husband out of the house. Of all nights for the hospital not to need him. The one time she needs to be alone to look at this stick, to figure out what to do with it, she also needs to figure out what to do with him.

She clears her throat. "You know, Har, I'm really hungry."

He lifts his head from her belly. "Yeah?"

"Very," she says.

"How does Chinese sound? I can go pick some up."

"Good. Perfect."

Harris rises off the couch as she snuggles inside her blanket's warmth. Some may call her silence inexcusable, her dishonesty manipulative and unfair. Sara knows, though, that everyone chooses their own weakness to hide beneath, blanket rising to the tip of their own chins.

"Don't forget the moo shu," she says.

The moon's light comes tumbling through the window, hitting his retreating back. "One thing..." He says, stopping in their living room doorway, his hand tugging on its edge. "We're going to fix all this. So don't hate me for it. Okay? Don't hate me for putting us here."

"I could never, Harris," she responds, sincerely. "Never."

He unclenches his hand and turns back around to face her. Smiling broadly, she can see again his belief that the deeds they have done are over, that they remain outside of a dirty studio over on the corner of South and 5th Street. She feels the depth of her betrayal, as her husband stands there unaware that underneath the blanket a color-changing stick still burns her hand. Her stomach contracts as the front door closes with its familiar click.

Time is up and another cliché presents itself: the longest and shortest ten minutes of her life become one and the same and it all comes down to this. Slowly, Sara removes the stick from beneath the blanket and stares at the 80% accurate life-detector in disbelief at what stares back at her. The color before her is nothing like she imagined, in either of her imaginings. If pregnant pink, she was sure it would have been a candy pink, like a little girl's wallpaper, like David's guilty couch. Or, in that one second when she questioned her body's energy, she imagined a white as smooth as hand-cream, as cold as igloos. Only this color

before her looks like none of the above. Rather, the color bares a gross resemblance to the leftover snow after a Philadelphia storm when the street's dirt laces it. It is white, without question. But it is the dirtiest shade of white Sara has ever seen.

Sara hears the quick click of her front door. "Hello?" she calls, shoving the tainted stick back beneath the blanket. "Har, is that you?"

"Sorry," Harris says, rushing back into their living room. "I forgot my wallet."

She looks behind her at the coffee table and sure enough there it is right next to where he left her.

"Here," she says, holding it out to him with her free arm.

"Thanks," Harris responds, taking it from her and looking more closely into her face. "Are you all right, Sara?"

She can tell him right now, what happened in the moment he left. A child had a whole life in that moment, a birth, the sweetest first-kiss, and a silent white death. Harris needs to be privy to these things and, yet, Sara knows they would upset him. When he looks at her he'll see David and her dancing beneath green neon sheets. He'll see a child she almost had and barely lost.

She nods. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

"I'm just hungry, Harris."

Convinced, he bends down to kiss her. It is a slow kiss, a careful one, but a kiss that speaks of years together, nevertheless.

"I'll be back," he says in a voice meant to impersonate Arnold Schwartzenegger. Sara remembers when Harris' imitation used to make her laugh so hard she couldn't find her breath. It still makes Harris smile, even now, though it has been years since she found it at all entertaining. But, this too, she will keep to herself.

The door closes behind Harris as he heads back out into the late evening cold to get them some food. Sara's face relaxes against the feel of her yellow blanket, encouraging her tired body to follow suit. She curls her knees against her chest and takes what she is sure is her first breath this entire December day. Maybe it feels like the day ended too cleanly, only it hasn't ended cleanly enough. Sara's most painful truths lie dormant, and she needs to find the strength to make that okay.

And then there's David, this strange man she assumed would disappear with his child. Yet, she can picture him clearly: sitting against his couch, strumming his guitar, ignoring the three quarters of his food uneaten on a plate beside him. Maybe he's started to wonder if it were a good idea to encourage her to try to work things out with Harris, to

explore, as he explained it, her false sense of safety. She can't wager any sort of guess about that, she decides, taking a more forced breath. All she knows for sure is she hopes Harris hasn't thrown away David's song. She may want it one of these days. Tonight, though, she is home again and despite everything that is enough. For tonight, there is still a comfort in knowing that anyone who says honesty always matters has never seen her husband smile.

*Laura Dave is a writer who lives in New York.*

## *Fishy Faith*

Thank God I didn't grow up in a religious family. All those Catholic horror stories (eight years of parochial school, plaid uniforms, white socks, severe nuns with their knuckle-rapping rulers, and, of course, everlasting guilt) have always evoked gratitude for my mom's secular ways. She did perform at least two rituals of obligatory Catholic parenting by having me baptized at two months old and, six years later, fitting me into a frilly white First Communion dress. But that's as far as it went. Sunday mornings were like Saturday mornings - neither one of them with a Mass to attend. Faith was just a girl's name, and I was an only child with little religion and a lot of imagination.

As many children do, I made this up. The dining room and its table became my office and desk, decorated with binders, papers and every pen and pencil in the house. Overturned furniture with a precarious arrangement of couch cushions and Mickey Mouse sheets became a military fort or the town's secret tunnel system. A pizza pan suspended from a light fixture became the judgement gong for an impromptu talent show. But when my mother was on the verge of using my bottom for a clapping session, I was sent outside to unleash my imagination on things she hadn't paid for. Things like big cardboard boxes and twigs.

After spending some time twisting off a backyard branch, I was inspired to play a game of "alone in the wilderness." I took the branch to my garage-turned-cabin to whittle a fishing pole, which only meant pulling back strips of pliant bark to reveal a thin, damp, ivory stick. This necessary chore, like hunting for food, was part of life "alone in the wilderness." So I found some string, tied it to one end of the pole and went fishing.

My make-believe cabin faced an access road scattered with rocks. I decided to imitate something out of a Norman Rockwell image and make one of those rocks my fish. Most of the stones were the ordinary gray kind, but some were the exotic color of eggplant, wine or forest green. My mission was to find a pretty one, tie it to the end of the line, and return to the cabin with my catch. I walked along the road, pushing the rocks around with the tip of my tennis shoe, in search of the perfect fish. I hadn't looked hard or long, but I soon grew impatient and interest in the wilderness scenario was about to lose out to the Barbie Beach House.

I will always remember the utter stillness of that afternoon. All the familiar sounds of the neighborhood had been absent - no trains rumbling down the tracks, no kids on the bikes buzzing by, no moms yelling through screen doors. But it was even hotter than it was quiet, so I committed to just one more toe-push when I spotted a piece of light blue something that looked like a candy wrapper. I bent down and pulled up a two-inch piece of formed plastic in the exact shape of a...fish! With the tiny fish in hand, I slowly tilted my head toward the sky and softly inquired, "...God?"

Of course, I never did tell anyone that story. For a long time I avoided any of its significance and didn't give much thought to my naïve response as an eight-year-old. But then I grew up. As adult life became increasingly more complex than a tunnel system of overturned furniture and bed sheets, my search for spirituality slowly emerged. Eventually the deeper meaning and the comforting rituals of religion, Sunday Mass, and reading the Bible were woven into my life.

Yet whenever I stop to consider faith and its origin, I always turn to that strange little memory of finding a plastic fish in a bed of rocks. It's a memory that has taken on such surreal qualities that I wonder if the whole thing could have been just my imagination. But maybe the imagination is where every story of faith begins.

*Audra Garcia is a third year student in the Mount's Weekend College. She is majoring in English.*

## *Mom*

I remember the first vibrations of feeling true and wretched anger and hurt towards my Mom. The sensation was thrilling. Even then, I did not recognize the emotion as such. I only felt disappointed that my Mom didn't take me to kindergarten on the first day of school. (It didn't matter that she didn't know how to drive). She wasn't there like all the other Asian moms fussing over their "going to kindergarten already" four year olds and worrying if we could outsmart those American kids at the playing house or finger painting. My dad gave me away instead. My dad left me at the main door. My dad drove away before I could even think of crying to detain him a bit longer. It didn't matter that Dad couldn't hack a single syllable of English, but Dad left because Mom wasn't there.

Looking back, I realize now that that anger reached its peak later in adolescence, as if she prepared me for my teenage-I-hate-you-Mom-parting. My elementary years were buttered. The first apartment home we were able to afford as immigrant had an upstairs entrance and a garage underneath. To supplement the rent, we rented out one of the three bedroom apartment rooms. Eleven people in two bedrooms makes for great body heat. It was one of the brisker nights of the winter season and we had chosen the weekend's worth of meals over heat. My three brothers and I chattered to a beat while the heater slept peacefully. My brother turned to the side and took the rest of the blanket that we were sharing. Mom took her tattered mustard yellow blanket she was using and wrapped me like a little yellow cocoon about to burst forth to show off her wings. Without a word passing between us, Mom slept with my baby brother's blankets that the nurses use to wrap newborns in when they first leave the hospital. Hot, sweaty, and not able to move, I burst out of my cocoon and glared at her angrily for doing such a stupid thing.

This was not the last of my icy stares. A stranger once walked up to me in the Little Saigon Shopping Center and said that my stare made him feel lonely. I stared. If people noticed, I glared. Mom fell victim to most of my silent treatments, unfortunately. Fortunate for me, her patience was my saving grace because she would not provoke me. (Only now am I beginning to see that she teaches through actions, not words). One of my Mom's most courageous acts, I believe, was allowing

herself to cry, allowing her tears to flow freely in front of her children, allowing her children to react to her vulnerability.

As usual, I raced my brothers to the car after school. As usual, they would let me think they were wallowing in my dust, then beat me at the last possible moment. Never really asking us "how school was," the ride home with Dad in our hand-me-down-stale coffee-colored wagon was uneventful. Walking up the stairs to the apartment, I can hear muffled sobs like a feline wailing for her mate. My youngest brother pushed open the door and Mom was on the floor. I sat on the urine stained couch against the wall of the front door. As Mom lay a few feet away from me, I wondered if her right side was numb, and how long she had been lying here like this. The puddle of salty tears emerged from her head region making me want to giggle. It looked like she was lying in a puddle of piss, only it was smaller than the stain I left on the couch a few weeks earlier. Maybe she pissed in her old country style black pants and was crying of embarrassment. It seemed an eternity before Mom looked at us and said, "Con oi! Ong Ngoai chet roi con oi!"Wanting so hard to laugh at the puddle, my fourth grade mind at its level of comprehension cried. First a sniffle, then a sympathetic wailing sob as a husband has sympathy pains for a newly pregnant wife. I sobbed, and together, we wailed on the floor, making the piss puddle increase in diameter. I cried, not that my grandfather has passed away, but that it hurt to see her cry. The realization of actually seeing Mom cry hit my brothers and me simultaneously. And like clockwork, we ended the show with a grand finale wail.

Like the end of a great epic, I am sorry yet humbled and grateful for the strength my mother showed me that afternoon. Every so often, it is okay to be vulnerable and let yourself be taken care of. It is okay to be afraid and trust that your soul will indeed survive.

I often wonder what life would be like if I were not here. Would Mom be content with three boys? Only after a distance of 300 miles and four years have Mom and I developed our own connection. We have become better friends. I feel she is comfortable with me now as a woman. Our brief moments of laughter when I do see her are seared and imprinted in my heart. And as always, that summer, she showed me through actions, not words, the power of laughter.

I was sitting at the kitchen table eating an early lunch and watching Mom. I like the way her left hand pushes tautly on her hip, just right above the crest of her buttocks. She leans heavily on her left heel and stir-fries away. The even rhythm of her chopsticks makes her hips rotate gently like a tentative beginning salsa dancer. Her beautiful

arched back is gaunt and muscular. She turns and we catch each other's eyes and smile. Like magic, in Mom's hand is the new Chevron with Techron toy car I've been wanting. In the next instant, Mom is on both hands and knees pushing the car across the kitchen floor, not without her version of vroom vrooms of course. I laugh so hard I run upstairs to change my panties. And like always, barely a word is spoken between us.

I have to admit, I learned the craft of storytelling from Mom. Even as a story, she shows us the power of her actions. Until she was in third grade, Mom was allowed to live at home. Before the end of the term, Grandma pulled Mom out of school and told her to take a job as a servant girl. I remember Mom's eyes when she told us how angry she was. She was so determined to show her mom up that she took on two servant jobs, plus a shoe shining business for the American GI's stationed in Da Nang.

David, my favorite soldier, always give me sweets and call me pretty. I always make sure I shine his shoes best. So shiny I could see my yellow teeth in them. When I go back to Binh Tuy a few months later, everyone say I shine Army dicks instead of Army boots. I was the town whore they say. Ah! Let them think what they want to. When I get to America, I'll show them. Even your dad he think I experienced. On our wedding night he tried to touch me and I slap him across the face. How do I know what sex? I think at sixteen that I sit next to a boy, I get pregnant! One week, one week later, when we get to know each other better, I let him touch me. It was delicious. But you don't try it. Not now. But seriously, I didn't know what sex is. Grandma never tell me. It hurt more the first time than having babies. My babies were fast. Very easy. Good line of giving birth genes. Your big brother, chicken coup. You, at ten in the morning, that's why you always running around like horses, never stay home with me. Your little brother, I was running to the midwife holding my skirt because his head already crying down there but his body still in me. The baby, in America. All less than thirty minutes. Jealous?

And as Mom went on and on about running away to the convent, and saving the best part of the fish for her drunk father, her eyes seemed to look right past me, as if she were trying to make me really understand. As hip and cool as I think I am, Mom is the true rebel. Her life force and her drive to be her own woman is what connects us. Despite circumstances, Mom always seems to pawn the situation into her game of

chess, as if she intentionally wanted things this way all along. Whether it is herbal medicine or the latest fashion, her knowledge of "what to do" is a vault of experience I hope to gain. I think if Mom had had the opportunity to go to school, she could have excelled in any field she chose to study. Mom is wise in home remedies for every ache and pain imaginable. Call it a self-fulfilling prophecy if you must, but until this day, I do not ingest prescribed drugs, only mom made medicines like her mysterious blend of jasmine tea.

My relationship with her has often inspired wonder as to what life would be like through her eyes. What were her emotions when she was most frightened? When my family decided to leave Vietnam, my father stole a fishing boat. Mom gathered passengers and on the final day before departure, she confronted the land lady in charge of the fishing boat census. Roadways and walkways are one and the same in Vietnam. As my Mom was standing on the edge of a five-foot drop embankment, the landlady, angry about her missing boat, pushed Mom. What were the thoughts and emotions she experienced? What courage to stand there. What physical and mental strength for survival as she rolled down the embankment, pregnant. More recently, my parents have agreed that mom is never to operate a moving vehicle. What happened that caused her not to see the one-way sign? Was there nervousness as she came to a screeching halt? Was there fear as she sat with the passenger side wheel hanging over the cliff with only a cheap dented metal rail to hold the wagon? I wonder. I think of Mom and I wonder about her, I long for her, and I cannot wait to see her. I cannot wait to see what new trick she has up her sleeve. I cannot wait to hear another story, for no one is more able than Mom.

Even now, I long for her ability to read these few passages about her. Knowing that the heart of my words will be lost in the translation saddens me. Perhaps if Grandma had allowed her to finish the third grade, she would have had the opportunity to learn the basics of English. Having taught herself to read and scribble in Vietnamese, I often ask my mother to allow me to help her learn English. And with every inquiry, Mom gently refuses. I know not if she feels too old to learn, but I suspect it is the angry pride of a mother struggling with the jealousy and pride of seeing her children's accomplishments.

I think of Mom and I wonder what kind of Mother I would be. I hope to be half of what shr is. The hate that subsided and climaxed like a roller coaster continued on through adolescence. As the hair and jeans of junior high faded out, so did this hated intensity. Now, there is embracing of mother and daughter, of situations, of past, present and

future, and of a peculiar tranquil understanding that cannot be described with words, only action.

*Huong Ho e is a senior with a major in Biological Sciences Pre-Physical Therapy and Gerontology. She enjoys singing, laughing and having a good time. Huong loves and collects books by Shel Silverstein.*

## *Easy Listening*

A Complete Play in One Fluid Act

Silhouette of two figures, genders indeterminate, on a large bed behind a screen of varying hues of blue. Music is low. It is the same notes of a piano repeated throughout the entire scene, insistent and maudlin, yet monotone. No more than five notes should be looped and repeated at the pace of a slow heartbeat. The individuals never rise from the bed, but can slowly change and alternate positions as desired.

M: I was lucky to lie on the dichondra, seemingly without parents, dreaming. This music reminds me of that time, which even then was more now. So do the colors gray and blue like the sky that would hum as I stretched on that grass. Isn't that what you desire? Consistency in the ungraspable?

S: Touch me.

M: It was at that moment that the future was malleable and endless. Not all moments of youth embody such freedoms. To be young is to be in chains, unless one is swimming in the ocean, vast and empty like desert tabula rasas, which we all conform in imagination. Rebirth, renewal. Sprint into and epiphanies occur. The cliffs of Laguna with the sun and the moon touching sand in water.

S: I want to lick your back and kiss that scar.

M: A person showed me love. We threw wineglasses. We walked up hills and didn't notice the flowers and concrete or the smells of bakeries and urine; only each other's eyelashes. Cunning. It's okay that people are interchangeable.

S: I love you.

M: The piano I listened to on the lawn, which we hear now, interchanges through scenes. One reminds us of the next. People are no different. You remind me of him who reminds me of her. Reality and

memory consist of restaurants and playhouses, planes and various cities and streets. Rooms and beds. People are forgettable but the stains on ceilings are embedded.

S: I walked into this room and kissed you in bed because you are an angel.

M: When one speaks of angels I see the dead. The people I will never see. I drove away in my car or deposited a letter or was left for something different with claims of desertion in favor of less difference. The future and past bring regret but only ghosts make me scream. Angels have wings.

S: The sheets were bloody and then I finally slept.

M: I see ghosts in my dreams. There's one who doesn't come as often as others, but when she does she's gentle. The woman weeps. Her tears are as blue as her eyes. Sometimes I am a passenger being driven as she apologizes and sometimes I spit on her when she says she's sorry. I never know what it is she's remembering. She is a stranger. But when I awake I am the one with memories weeping.

S: Let us bleed again together because if I can't have that I would be empty. Emptier.

Stage: This entire dialogue must be faintly repeated in total, (slightly after the original words are spoken) in other languages with different actors, while English subtitles flash above the stage in yet another azure hue. First scene English with man and woman respectively. Second scene Spanish two men. Third scene French two women. ad infinitum. Final scene English with woman and man respectively. As the silhouettes move, stretch, recline, they never touch.

## *...never reaching the end...*

On the seventh day of September, one year ago, I killed my father. On the same day, at the exact time, I killed the self I knew: myself.

Over the past several years before this, I had been indoctrinating myself with feminist writing and thought, so the natural culmination would be the death of the father. Next Friday, one week from now, I will be testifying under oath in the Orange County Superior Criminal Court, against this man.

The day of our death occurred one week after my twenty-first birthday. Everything my father and I shared ended when I told my mother to protect her six and eight year old daughters, and as I told her why (which I need to remember detail by exact unfaltering detail because of the pending cross-examination) the despair of silence, betrayal, chaos, and bitter loss were severing my face with words and tears. It seemed to me that God had devised a fitting tragedy for such a strong vocal feminist. And it seemed not devised at all, but rather a predictable way of becoming politicized, through personal pain unspeakable. We were inclined to be desperate with one another, always overacting the roles of weak little girl and big safe dad, but when I destroyed him I began to comprehend who he was and then feared the woman I turned out to be.

I knew my father well. I remember us getting along perfectly, with off color jokes shared and democracy argued with laughter. When I negated him I realized how odd this memory was considering that when I had run away at fourteen, he told the police, who had picked me up only out of curiosity because I was so clean in such a dirty area, to throw me in jail. I prayed to go to prison so I would never have to return home.

My father grew up a poor Jew raised in the black housing projects of Montebello. He was the youngest of three boys who teased him constantly. He told me he couldn't compete with them academically because he hated school and he couldn't compete with them physically because of his asthma, so with a lifelong determination to outdo his brothers, he stared a pattern in high school of having the fastest new cars and the best looking girls.

He was, I think, very handsome. I gather this from my memories of him in Hawaii, looking like a movie star, slim and tan with a mustache. His eyes were blue and I always noticed them smiling when he would talk of me, bragging of my accomplishments. I thought he was the most handsome man in the whole wide world and I wanted to marry him when I grew up. He had charm to accompany his looks and he chose to show others that pair, with his bitterness reserved for my mother and me. We would be the two who would bear witness to the throwing of the wineglasses, the ripping of clothes off bodies and closet racks. We would be strewn with the remnants of his anger as he peeled

out in his red corvette to disappear for days. He was cruel, telling my mother she looked like shit when she would dress up for him. The lines in his forehead would grow deep over his cold eyes when we wept. This coldness became apparent to all others and soon none of us had any friends. Nobody would visit and the three of us would move from neighborhood to neighborhood without any neighbors and always I would cry. I used to cry for hours every day for my entire childhood and I have seen him do this only once, during a song by the Moody Blues. I was sitting in the passenger seat of his car, all grown up, as he sobbed openly with regret because he knew himself to be at fault for the daughter beside him who screamed from nightmares every night and who hurt herself with people and substances so she could then blame herself for this terror and leave the man she loved blameless. Now I will cry only once more and it will be in court while I hear his tears are falling every single day.

The last time I saw him, he was fat and much shorter. The weight that hunches him down has left his face unburdened and although heavy, he looked like a skeleton. His eyes were very blue as he told me that I am the only thing he ever did right in his life. I was the only female left who he could equate his success to. He taught me how to be a girl and I had turned out to be such a good one. I had learned to cultivate sexiness with a coy flirtatious smile. I was the ideal sweetie pie who mixed little giggles with sassy dominance at all the right times. I had colored hair, nails, lips, and eyelids to flash when at his side and contact lenses so the boys around me would be sure to make passes and make my daddy proud. He taught me how to dress by buying me high heels and mini-skirts and when he paraded me around in front of army bases in Oahu and casinos in Vegas, he taught me what I was. Other men whistled, hooted, ogled as my father strutted holding my hand and I wobbled in my six-inch pumps beside him. I was twelve years old. He found a form of acceptance through me and I found validity through objectification. I perfected this art and he would watch the product of himself on his giant television. He would stay up all night and search the screen for the commercials I would be on and tape them. He had every commercial and sitcom episode on videocassette so he could look at me laugh, smile, wink, and pout over and over and over and over again. He would not sleep at night. He would watch me.

I know what I will wear on the witness stand. I will wear eyeglasses and a suit like a man with my nails unpolished and bitten. I will wear men's cologne with mascara, waterproof and my guilt will be craving a cigarette. Perhaps a female cannot ever be a woman or perhaps a

woman can only be a victim or a stereotype.

My father was a victim of the American ideology of the '50s. Everything was a product to be purchased only to be thrown away repeatedly for the new and improved model. He discarded the voluptuous pin-up housewife for the small-breasted beehive for the variety of the sexual revolution. He said that he needed a revolving door for all of the women coming in and out of his bedroom during those years. In the '80's I was eleven years old with a chest as flat as the new supermodels on the runways and with a child's natural audacity very similar to that of the emerging corporate female. I became a commodity to be used. I wonder if I will look at him as I am on the stand explaining those dark evenings. I wonder if I will have the opportunity to explain that although we know we will not ever speak again, we both also know that we will, until death, be intertwined...

"Nights in white satin. Never reaching the end. Letters I have written never meaning to send. 'Cause I love you. Yes I love you. Oh how I love you'."

## *Coffee*

I receive sustenance each day at the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf for three dollars and sixty cents. At this rate of intake, I will be spending over thirteen hundred dollars by the end of this year on ritual. I have no loyalty to the location of the establishment, although I must admit that the Bean on Melrose, where I recently witnessed Jerry Seinfeld indulging, now reserves a special place in my palate. I generally swing by the Larchmont or Sunset Plaza locations and once I enter the foyer the expected ceremony begins. I wait in the invariably long line, say "ice blended mocha please", pay in exact change with an attempt to release as many pennies as possible from my pocketbook, get the pink drink card punched, give them my name and then wait to hear "Jamie". Each time a name is called I leap towards the counter anxiously and then retreat with what is almost devastation when I realize that the beverage is not mine but Janet's or Jimmy's or some actor or agent looking over screenplays and call sheets.

The initial sip is very luxurious. Standing solitary, I drink this most decadent item with the crowd chattering around me. We need ritual in

our life. Separated from God and the earth by media and capitalism respectively, we yearn for an opiate for us masses. Religion through the routine of spending money and buying Our Savior in an ice-blended no-sugar added soymilk ultimate mocha with chocolate covered espresso beans mixed in. I solemnly accept this Eucharist from the counter girl and after the aforementioned luscious sip, I begin to frolic for the moon goddess and dance with a slither through the swarms of coffee-needers for our modern Bacchus.

This malleable coffee god introduced himself to me in France. I remember arguing with myself (as I often do still) at an outdoor table of a typical Parisian cafe. Should I enjoy the feel and taste of the liquid in my mouth or should I concern myself with the workers in South America, impoverished and suffering? Can I strut in haute couture without oppressing my sisters in the sweatshops of Thailand? Vacillating between physical pleasure and political sin, I invariably opt for the guilty gratification of my body.

The enjoyment lasts for a blissful fifteen to twenty minutes as I swish and gulp the chunky liquid. The caffeine in my drink is double, like the pretension. I would never drink a simple coffee and if the ol' cup o' joe was offered I would instead request a half ice-tea and half lemonade with sweet and low or possibly a cran-rasberry cocktail with a dash of soda water.

After I complete the delectable icy espresso, I think that although absolutely satisfying, the repercussions really are not worth the pleasure. When I throw the plastic cup away I decide also to cast ritual aside. I would like to be a hedonist without guilt, but from a utilitarian perspective the pro is physical gratification while the cons are financial waste, political injustice, environmental hazards and worst of all, debilitating headaches. I do not need a jealous god of coffee inflicting me with the wraith of migraines if I reject him. If ritual is necessary and chosen, then I should exercise my freedom to select one that isn't so problematic.

*Jamie Jacobs, upon her May graduation, will continue to explore and embrace life in all of its beautiful and unbeautiful forms. Her interests involve all human rights. Her hobbies are books and water.*

# Lisa Laguna

*Memoir*

I often wonder if grown-ups remember what it is to be small. I think most folks remember what it was to be a child. We are children until we're not. That's not so hard to recall, but do people remember what it is to be small?

That day, I was the smallest thing in the world. When I was 11, I was awkward looking. Puberty was taking its time, and I still looked like a boy. My stepfather made me wear long hair, in an effort to make sure that the others were not confused. I was too thin and my skin was darker than the others in the house. The "little Mexican girl" is what they called me. It was frustrating, but I never found the courage to say, "soy Cubana." I'm sure that would've cost some teeth.

I am one of my mother's three children. We all have different fathers. She will tell you how each one of them is special. My older brother, his father died in Vietnam. That gave meaning and purpose to my brother's life – the love child. My dad was a rebound, father image type. He was 26 years older than my 20-year-old mother. He was a slick handsome Cubano. She was the young, hurting, searching, lonely Irish girl. Inspired by "I Love Lucy" shows, my folks hooked up. A few years later, my mother was bored. She met our neighbor, and before we knew it, my mother, brother and I were on the road with our neighbor, "Uncle John," the bigot. This was true love.

A couple of years later, my little sister was born. Shortly after, my mother married the bigot. She was trying to give at least one of her children some legitimacy. This became the pieces of our happy home.

When you're small, you can run around without tiring, and you can find peace playing baseball in the kuldesac. That day, when I came home, the bigot was waiting for me. I wasn't sure what he wanted, but I was afraid. He asked me to approach him. I closed my hands and walked toward him. In less than a minute, he shattered my being. "Your dad is dying." Suddenly, I was so small, and everybody, everything around me was mammoth. "Dying...heart attack...stroke...coma...brain dead...machines...dead...dead...dead?" Stop! Where's the ground? I couldn't find the ground. I was standing on confusion and terror.

My dad was my only friend. He was the only person who could love me without hurting me. He was my heart. It was from him that I

received my contrasting brown hair and eyes. Because of him, I could get a sun tan. He loved the brown-ness that was me, the brown-ness that made my life unbearable as a little person. "We live like Americans, talk like Americans, we better start looking like them," the bigot used to say. My brown-ness, which goes unnoticed by most, was an inconvenience in my house. We had to wait till the winter months to take family photos. The tan would wear off a little by then. "These damn Mexican, Castro-loving commies should not be impregnating women," the bigot would say.

Brain Dead? What is that? Oh, my head was shaking violently. My heart became a sword piercing itself. "Coma? Machines? That's not living," the bigot said. Oh my God, where is my daddy? I didn't feel myself hit the ground. I didn't feel the bigot pick me up and slap me around. I don't remember my mother coming home from work and taking me to the hospital. I can vaguely recall an echo, "Don't be letting those commies hug and kiss her, there is venom in their mouths."

"There is the little one...," the commies said. They were afraid to approach me. Their faces were long and narrow. They weren't frowning, but their lips were tight. I was my father's youngest child. He had two sons from previous marriages. They were a little younger than my own mother. The second oldest was there. As I was walking through the corridor of the hospital, the hall seemed to get more and more narrow. The walls grew taller and so did the people standing along them. Or was I getting smaller? I can't remember. There were women in white standing in front of the door that had three letters in red on it. ICU. I didn't know what it meant. I didn't ask. I heard the women talking with my mother. "She is his daughter," she said. They looked at me with half open eyes and opened the door. My mother was walking in front of me. I could not understand where I was. There were beds with people all over and beeping sounds came from each of them.

I began to panic. Why am I here? I thought. What is that beeping sound? No! I don't want to go any further. My mother turned around and saw me stop. She grabbed my hand, "let's go and get this over with," she grunted. I wouldn't move. "If you make a scene..." it became silent. I just saw him there – my dad. My mother pushed me toward the bed and closed the curtain. "Joe," she said, "Lisa's here...she's come to say goodbye. Joe, she needs to say goodbye right now." She left. I was in the curtained world of good-byes and misunderstandings.

I couldn't move for a few moments. I could only stare. For the

first time in my life, I saw every wrinkle on his face. I could tell that he didn't shave that morning. I saw the gray hair stubble on his chin. Gray hair? My dad didn't have gray hair. He did. I never noticed before. The sides of his lips were sunk in. I touched them. He had no teeth. I never even knew that my dad wore dentures. As I touched his lips, I felt the tube. I heard the beeping noise again. I saw his chest rising and lowering with the billowing machine next to his bed. Machines? These are the machines everybody was talking about. Oh my God! Daddy!

I began to cry. I laid my head on his chest and cried. I begged him not to leave. I told him how sorry I was for being bad. I told him I couldn't live without him. Who was going to love me? Somebody help him please. My mother came barging in. She grabbed my hair, "I told you not to make a scene." I couldn't hear her anymore. I could only hear the cracking in my heart.

"Let's go!" my mother said. She forced me under her armpit and dragged me through the hall. I don't know if she was trying to console me or if she was ashamed that I had started crying. We treaded the long corridor again. I could hear the whispers. "There's Joe's baby." "That was his world." "She looks exactly like him." "Poor thing." I wanted to look at them, but my mom kept my head buried in her armpit.

When she let me go, we were in the hospital cafeteria. I wonder how many family reunions take place in such cafeterias? I saw tías that I had not seen since I three or four. I saw my brother Richard for the first time in seven years. He looked at me, patted my head and went on with business. That's why they call this kind of stuff business. They don't call if life or death. They don't call it the God game. They call it business.

My brother was the official next of kin who had been asked to make the decision about the life support machines that kept my father alive. My brother had not talked with my dad in a few years. Now my dad's life was in his hands. It was his business to take care of. I made a slight protest. "You will understand when you grow up," my brother said to me. I will understand they said. I didn't know about that, but I did know that when I grew up I wasn't going to have my dad. This guy gets to make the decisions and I get to suffer not him. He had already grown up and decided not to have a relationship with my dad. Without even asking me, he was taking that chance away from me.

I felt myself shrinking again. Suddenly, everyone around became towers. I went to the others in the room. I asked them what

was happening. They just touched my cheek and said sorry. Sorry? Why were they saying sorry? They were the ones giving up on him. My 11-year-old heart could not see past my own pain and loss. I could not see beyond the reality that I was going unheard. I could not deal with the reality my dad was going to die. I hated every person in that cafeteria that night. I even hated my dad. Why would he do this to me?

After the papers were signed, my mother made me kiss every person present. They took turns holding me, half expecting me to cry in their arms. I could not. I had no tears to offer them for their dramas. I left without a single operating sense. I couldn't hear or see anything. I could no longer feel my broken heart. I knew I was alone.

That evening I went straight to bed. I could hear the phone ringing all into the night. I was sure one of those rings was the message that my dad had passed. I didn't care. I didn't want to know. Most of all, I didn't want my mother or the bigot to be the one to tell me. That night I stayed with my dad. While in my own bed, I begged him to hold me. I begged him not to let me forget him. I asked him to please come back.

The irony of life always wins over out over expectations. My dad did not die that night. They did disconnect the life support machines. Family members waited and one by one left his bedside. His fiancée stayed with him for several days. He did not die then. My dad died ten years later in a convalescent home. He never woke up and never said a word, nor did he leave me when I begged him to stay. In the end, my dad died of pneumonia, at no other hand than that of God.

*Lisa Laguna graduates from MSMC in the spring of 2000*

Joyce Liu

## *Mood Indigo*

When Penguin and I hung out on Friday nights, we never drank. We ate but never got drunk. We'd eat sushi with Lay's, cheeseburgers in between sips of fruit juice, tortilla chips dipped in strawberry ice cream. Then we would go over to see the same movies we loved: "A Patch of Blue", "Cool Hand Luke", "Charade", and "Vertigo." I suspect we're the ones that kept the Rialto running in those days.

When it rained (practically everyday), Penguin and I would pretend we were homeless. As if our lives weren't glamourous enough, we'd stretch our blankets over our heads and hide under the plush of protection. As for the shopping cart, well, we imagined that too. Misers that won the lottery years ago, we refused to buy a house and live safely. No one knew that the crates in our cart contained gleaming bricks of solid gold. We waited for the day we'd change our minds. When called to dinner, Penguin never flinched. Blankets layered atop our heads, like giant eyelids shielding us from the damp world. Reality could never bite and snap back. We were only eight.

One Christmas, I got a toy cashier. Penguin nearly fainted with joy. The next several months proved to be the most exciting time of our lives. From credit cards to checks, we played "Shopping" every chance we got. Groceries, catalogs, candy and pies – we no longer wanted to be homeless. But like most childhood days, ours fell victim to time – adolesence playing its phony tricks, imaginations stunted by the sudden yearning to mature. It was during our seventeenth year when we lost touch. Penguin moved and I stayed behind.

Sometimes, I can hear Penguin's voice in the rain. Like a personalized echo reverberating off each splat, Penguin tells me we're eight again. And it's not just a voice I hear. It's the soundtracks to the movies we rented, the crunch of tortilla chips kissing ice cream. I hear these and more.

In college, I was a terrible insomniac. In between bouts of stress and depression, I missed more labs and deadlines than I can count. I never even bothered to show up late. It wasn't long before they called me in to the deans office right before my finals senior year. I could've easily ditched and got a donut before my next final. But I didn't. With my trademark sheepish expression, I put on a clean shirt and

brushed my hair. The knots were almost impossible. Dignity in my back pocket, I walked along the contrived path of daisies and cheap grass. After my arrival they closed the door. I refused to sit down. Their message was plain and simple: either I raise my 0.8 GPA or get out. I told them that an earlier warning would have been much appreciated, but they only glared down on me, their readers hanging on to their elitist noses for dear life. So I smiled, turned and left.

What can I say? In three months, I went from the dean's list to the shit list. It wasn't entirely my fault. They should have considered the scholarship candidates with more scrutiny than the usual overzealous charity. Besides, I never even mentioned Rachmaninoff or that Handel and his dreary Baroque. When I auditioned, they named a song that I mistook for "Éclair da Boom" – only to find out years later it was Debussy's "Claire de Lune." So instead, I played what I knew. The Duke. Like a stretch of rhythmic saviors, I let the energy flow from my head to my fingers. I can almost feel that strobe beating down on me, bright and hot on my profile. In the end, the offered me the classical piano scholarship anyway. I guessed that the jazz quota had filled up long before my audition.

My first semesters weren't that bad. In fact, I had a great time. In class, everyone would show up with their blood and sweat pieces and perform as though Shumann and Mozart sat in the front of the room. As for me, I walked into class with new improvisational pieces that mixed the sound of train engines to the beat of Dizzy's trumpet. It was before I gave up on the meaning of attendance, the feigned scholarship fresh in my lurid horizon. I was the only American in those piano classes – not to mention the only kid lost to jazz. Against their Bach daydreams, I banged on Steinway keys to the voices of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. My classmates loved my pieces. They couldn't get enough.

After that sad encounter with the dean's office, I got my donut anyway. I hadn't studied for my philosophy final and ten minutes was not enough time to cram the principles of Plato, not to mention the varying degrees of Marxist belief. The beach was calling me, the seagulls beckoning pieces of my glazed donut. The salt of the high tide teased my senses. I almost went. But the one thing those dreamers-turned-administrators taught me was this: high time I pull myself together. So I showed up to the lecture hall where bowed heads hung in stillness and creaked myself up the steps and into one of those all too familiar chairs built for Plato's robot world. I don't know what I wrote, but that ditzy TA must have really felt my style because not only did I pass, I got a "B." And as far as I can remember, a "B" signifies "good

and above average." Two days before school let out for winter break, I didn't miss one final and raised my GPA to a 2.0. Nothing to brag about, but solid enough to keep those guys off my back and for me to return after the new year. I was 22, twenty pounds underweight and hadn't slept a wink for weeks.

I didn't return the next semester. Over the winter break, I heard that Penguin had fallen ill and died as a result of a brain tumor. According to neighbors, it was benign. But somehow, a second one had hid itself within a groove, attaching itself to nerves. Only by the time of discovery, the damage was too far gone to be saved. Three thousand miles away from me, I held Penguin in my arms where blankets shielded us from the outside rain, promising the savor of tortilla chips with ice cream in the next lifetime.

That new year was 25 years ago. "Charade" came on last night around two. Arthritis haunts my hands where the bones mingle in between the scrubbing of laundry. I've finally made up my mind. The piano tuner comes tomorrow morning at ten. I will polish the dust off the lid before dawn breaks. I can only hope those scales are still inside of me, the burn of rhythm deep in my young perception. I can mourn no more.

*Joyce Liu is a third year student majoring in English and Art.*

## *Backseat*

*Seventy-five years old, thought the old woman. Seventy-five years old and I'm sitting in the goddamned backseat.* She stared at her fat daughter and her fat son-in-law in the front seat. She stared at the backs of their fat necks. She stared at their fat six-year-old daughter sharing the backseat with her, making unattractive spitting noises and playing with a naked Barbie doll. *Sitting in the goddamned backseat of my own goddamned car.*

They were speeding down a four lane stretch of freeway, darting in and out of traffic; too fast, in her opinion. Her son-in-law couldn't drive worth a damn, if you asked her. But no one ever asked her. What did she know anyway? She was just an old woman. *An old woman who deserved to sit in the front seat of her own goddamned car.*

The chubby progeny next to her was singing now: a rambling, nasal, whining sort of tune that went nowhere. The child had produced a horrendous miniature pink dress with sequins and netting and was trying to pull it roughly over the doll's unkempt nest of waxy hair. She had the damn thing upside down and the tiny neckline was wrenched painfully over one shoulder. The netted skirt stood up in the air, some sort of horrid pink sunflower with a blonde center. It looked obscene to the old woman: the doll's smooth, unnatural nakedness and that gaudy pink atrocity pulled over her head.

"Gimme that thing, Melody. I'll fix it for you," said the old woman, impatiently wagging her hand at the doll.

"No!" barked the girl, yanking the doll close to her chest and throwing her meaty little elbow up in her grandmother's direction. "I can do it," she pouted and ripped the dress off Barbie's head. The old woman imagined the poor toy gasping for breath. She could use some air herself.

It took her a moment to locate the gadget on the door that opened the window, and when she did it hummed only halfway down. She cursed quietly to herself, clicking the button again. *Damned child-proof windows. Do I look like a child?* She took a deep breath, trying her best to enjoy the breeze that came through the half-mast window and ignore the small grunts of the kid as she continued to struggle with her doll.

"Close the window, Mom," called her son-in-law from the front, not even bothering to turn around. "We'll turn on the air conditioner if you're hot."

She hated air conditioners, they gave her the impression of being trapped in a tank. And she hated it when he called her "Mom."

"I like the window," she said.

"What?" he called, blaring the horn, *her* horn, at a passing motorist.

"I LIKE THE WINDOW!" She yelled, making her granddaughter jump. That made him turn around and look at her, though only for a moment. No more was said about it.

The kid was now trying to tug the dress up over the doll's long, bronze legs. The fabric caught and snagged on Barbie's rubber thighs. One of the pointed feet was tangled in the netting of the skirt and it was beginning to tear. The neckline was hopelessly stretched out. A pile of loose sequins had begun to collect in the girl's lap.

The old woman reached carefully across, peacefully offering assistance. "Let me help you, Melody."

The child let out a sharp shriek before she could get anywhere near the doll. "No!" shouted the kid indignantly, "Stop it, Gramma!"

The old woman snapped her hand back as her daughter and son-in-law cast half-looks over their fat shoulders. *Damn brat should be in a carseat.* She turned her face back toward the window; part fresh air, part smudged glass.

"Barbie likes her dress like this," mumbled the child to herself. "It's a special dress. She likes it like this." The thing was yanked over one shoulder like a pink toga, one pointy breast poking out rudely. The net skirt had torn almost all the way around and was hanging ragged at the doll's feet. Barbie was a pathetic sight, hanging by her hair from a pudgy six-year-old fist.

It would take only a moment to fix. The grandmother could tell where the fabric was twisted under the doll's arm. Her fingers itched to untangle the pink mess and make Barbie look like a respectable woman. She could even see a way to tuck that skirt back into place.

The child caught her looking at the doll. She stuck her tongue out at the grandmother, thrusting the doll forward.

"See, Gramma," she said. "I can do it."

The old woman closed her eyes and sighed *Damn brat.* She could feel the doll's feet tap against her arm where the taunting kid still held it, swinging, by the hair.

The grandmother moved quickly, before she was aware of what

she was doing, without even opening her eyes. In one swift movement and a fraction of a second she ripped the blonde thing from the kid's fist and launched it out the childproof window.

There was a brief moment of shocked silence before the granddaughter started screaming.

*Annie Matthews is a junior pursuing an English major and a Single-Subject Credential. She loves theatre, drama, and literature in general.*

Amanda Prince

## *Fire on the Mountain*

A black scorpion emerged from its hole in the desert floor, one front claw appearing, then the next, before the body and tail shone in the sun as particles of dust rolled off its armor. Elias watched this, wondering at the nocturnal animal's daytime appearance.

"Sandy, check out the scorpion," Elias said, addressing his companion laid out on the desert floor.

"They're nocturnal – they're actually phosphorescent in the dark, they glow in the dark – so I don't know why this one's crawling around," Elias continued, "it's too hot." There was no response from Sandra, though in the mid-day sun, the swollen discolorations around her thin neck screamed against her wax-paper skin. Elias looked down at this marring, and then out across the landscape, tan desert dotted with low shrubs and Joshua trees rising against distant maroon mountains at the other side of the valley's basin.

"They're sort of like cockroaches. At Los Alamos, they found scorpions at ground zero right after the bomb detonations." Around her head, Sandra's gold streaked brown hair had the look of a frozen firework against the dull dust of the earth. "If we lost it, and obliterated the population of our planet in some apocalyptic nuclear holocaust, there'd still be scorpions and cockroaches," Elias laughed, his smile fading as he tasted dried blood on his lip. A rivulet of perspiration flowed between his shoulder blades under his ripped and sweat-marked t-shirt.

"What else could I do, Sandy," Elias yelled, his cry echoing.

The day before, Elias had woken up with plenty of other options available, what lay before him by his own hand not considered among them. Seven in the morning on that Saturday, he shut his alarm off and plodded to the bathroom, thankful for the day's respite from both school and his $6.75-an-hour job as an assistant at the E-Z-Glo tanning salon. Another day of American Government and orange-roasted clients, Elias thought, would drive anyone to homicide. He looked into the mirror and picked the sleep from his brown-freckled green eyes and smoothed his fine black eyebrows. In an hour and a half, he was due to pick up Sandra, his best friend, and they would head out for a Greatful Dead concert in Vegas. Unbeknownst to her, Elias had also added an item of discussion to the day's agenda: love. Specifically, his for her and his hopes that she felt the same. She had

sat down in the seat next to him in the second grade (he remembered exactly the then-long dark blonde pony tail that fell down to her waist,) and in the eleven years since, they had been eachother's confidante, companion and occasional partner-in-crime through life's obstacles, from multiplication tables and scheming boyfriends or girlfriends to the greater losses, like the death of Elias' mother.

On his way out the door, Elias said goodbye to his father seated at the kitchen table with the front-page section of the paper open in front of him and untouched coffee growing cold. His father's gaze was focused on the chair across the table, or perhaps more accurately, the absence of his wife there, and the girl-like giggle that no longer bounced off the formica tabletop and into his heart. His father, before so stoic, the man who would tell his son to "Buck up and take it like a man" when he fell off his bicycle, had wept endlessly. Elias, though now capable of articulating his feelings, could never allow such an instinctive and animal release. He shut the back door and turned to look through the glass pane, wondering if his father would come back or if he was forever nestled next to the emaciated form of Elias' mother, though her rasping breath was now silenced by cancer's consumption. .

The automatic garage door closed with a whir and a thump, as the muffler of Elias's vintage Bug, a sixteenth birthday gift from his parents, scraped the driveway. He drove down his neighborhood's Buick and Beemer riddled streets towards Sandra's blue-collar avenue. When he pulled up to her house, she yelled goodbye to her parents as she slammed the front door behind her. She bent to chuck her cat's chin before she tore past her father's plumbing truck and threw open the car door, landing in the seat next to Elias.

"Hey," she said, kissing him on the cheek, "why does your car smell like french fries?"

"Maybe because of the Mc Donald's container you left in my car," he replied grinning. "Did psychotic-Sam call you again last night, or has he given up?"

"I think he's given up," Sandra said with a roll of her eyes, the shards of black in their brown irises sharp in the morning light. "Although I don't think he's dumb enough to really believe I'm a lesbian, despite what you told him. Thanks for trying though," she finished with a giggle.

"Well, that's what friends are for," Elias said.

The streets of their suburban town were deserted and they quickly arrived at the equally empty freeway. Sandra turned on the radio and rolled the tuning knob around while Elias ranted about the

head of the tanning salon, a chalk-white and doughy man who brought with him a wind of managerial tyranny disguised in the Dilbert-satirized kind of pop-leadership theory when he came into work.

"How's your dad," Sandy interrupted.

"Um...I dunno. You know, still shut off and not really there," Elias answered, scratching his head. "He goes to work, comes home, the usual. Asks how I'm doing and I could say that my leg fell off and he'd give his standard lobotomized 'Oh, that's good, son.' You know?"

"Yeah," she said softly.

"Hey, Sandy..."

"Yeah?"

"There's some stuff I need to talk about."

"'Kay, I'm listening," she responded, flipping the radio off and turning to Elias, the sinews of his neck tense as he glanced over his left shoulder before sliding in the next lane. His eyes now blankly on the distance ahead, he spoke. "I don't really know how to say this, and I don't want to make things weird," he began, "and you know our friendship's really important to me and I don't kno–"

"Elias, spit it out."

"...I love you."

"Well, I love you too."

"No, I love you."

"Oh. Like..."

"Yeah," he breathed.

"Oh. Wow."

The Bug was silent save for the sound of the engine and asphalt under the tires. Elias looked at Sandra, looked at the thick fringe of eyelash dusting her cheek and at the pale pout of her sealed lips that floated next the jut of her jawbone. In sum, she was only average, though to him she was incomparable. He turned back to the road as she lifted her eyelids and sighed.

"I'm sorry, Elias," she said, and though the cracking apart of his heart was deafening when she spoke, she continued. "You're my best friend, you're beyond that even. You're probably the most important person in the world to me, and I think you're wonderful – I mean, come on, you're the only guy I know who read Romeo and Juliet for fun and watches the Learning Channel instead of Monday night Raw," she joked, "but we can't be anything other than that. It's all too important to jeopardize with some fragile, transient idea of teenage romance." She reached to touch his right arm and met air as he yanked it away, leaving his left hand resting on the steering wheel.

"It'd be good, Sandy, really good," Elias finally said. "You let those other bastards near you, you let them in and then come to me when you're hurt and need help," he continued, "and the same goes for me, so why don't we just forget it and be together?"

"Elias, you're not hearing me. Because ultimately, we fall back on each other when no one else is there – what if we hurt each other? And if we hurt each other irreparably, what would we do then," she asked. "Or worse, what if it was just weird and we just drifted apart because things were too awkward afterwards? How stupid would that be?"

"You know that wouldn't happen."

"Elias..."

He was quiet and so was she, as they both marveled at the tear that wet his lip, she at its mere existence on his face and he that there were not more.

"It's okay," he finally muttered. "Forget I said it."

*****

They arrived at the stadium in Vegas by four o'clock that afternoon, their earlier tension erased by two stops to water the over-heating engine and a stop at a Lucky's to grab provisions for the long night ahead. Though it was the middle of October and still mild at home, it was painfully hot in the desert. The lot was nearly full, crowded with milling people and the countless VW vans of Deadheads, who followed the band as they toured, as well as the varied cars of the less fanatical who still participated in society. By six thirty, the sun had set and people had migrated into the horseshoe shaped stadium. Though the concert was sold out, the seats were only partly full. Many had abandoned their ticket-assigned seats to cluster on the floor in front of the stage or around the back. Elias and Sandra opted for their seats to avoid tripped out and dancing hippies and sundry other annoyances.

The first set began forty-five minutes late, but by then they both had a pleasant contact high and were enjoying the spectacle below. Though the crowd was predominantly white, beyond that there were few similarities. There were seventy-five year old men and newborn babies, relatively affluent suburban kids like themselves, and packs of urchin children who'd been conceived, born and raised on tour, knowing nothing else. A panhandler approached them collecting bail money for his friend who had been arrested at the previous night's show. They both emptied the change from their jeans pockets, and on the bleacher beside Elias, Sandra stretched out on her back and rested

her head on his thigh.

As the Dead's "Touch of Gray," their only real mainstream hit, rambled from the amplifiers and Elias looked down at Sandra, eyes closed and wiggling in place to the music. His fingers touched her chin and trailed down her neck to where her collarbones met. Sandra looked at him and hopped up, grabbing his hands and pulling him to his feet as well. She led him in a wild dance down the precarious bleachers to the floor, where they joined the crowd.

Three and a half hours later, the show had ended and Sandra and Elias were mellowed with pot and music. Now the parking lot was crowded with traveling vendors, who had pinned necklaces to bandanas and wore layers of display bootleg t-shirts. They wandered around, flashing their wares like New York street sales men with fake Rolexes. They stopped and bought water and bagels with cream cheese and vegatables before Elias led the way to the Bug, where they climbed on to the dome and ate cross-legged in silence.

Sandra thought of the show, in particular a little girl, who couldn't have been more than three, who had tugged at her shirt. Sandra had looked to find the girl's parents, who saw her first and waved. She waved back and took the girls hands, and they swayed to the music and laughed together, the little girl with snaggle front teeth and apple cheeks, before Sandra took her back to her parents. Elias, who thought of nothing but Sandra – Sandra and the little girl, Sandra with her head in his lap, Sandra on that first day of second grade – spoke first.

"What do we do when we graduate?"

"Who knows, that's a year away."

"Sandy, we'll probably go to different schools, you know."

"We'll keep in touch and visit – we'll still be tight."

"Things change...we might go to the same school, though..."

"That's not likely and you know it, Elias. You're a better student and can afford a better school," Sandra said, " and you want to go to the East coast – I couldn't stand the cold...besides, I might not even go to college."

"Speaking of ridiculous, Sandy. You're too smart not to go."

"Whatever. We'll see. It'll be okay, however things work out"

"I can't imagine life without you," Elias said. Seeing Sandra's shoulder's tighten and her eyes dart to the side at his comment, he lightened it by adding, "Who would show me what to do if my car overheats again," and laughing.

"I can't believe that's never happened to you with that car, you

ninny," she teased. Too exhausted for the drive home, they slid off the top of the car to find a VW bus they could sleep in.

*****

Sandra awoke first the next morning and elbowed Elias, who slept next to her. They had found the little girl, Scarlet, and her family, who had traveled in a Winnebago from Central California to see the show. The parents, Amy and Don Cannon, had shared their bed with their daughter so Sandra and Elias could have the other. While Sandra tried to scrub the goo off her teeth with a damp paper towel and toothpaste, Elias composed a thank-you note to the Cannons. They crept out of the RV just before dawn and made it to California-Nevada stateline by six thirty.

Two hours into the middle of nowhere, Elias turned off the highway and onto a telephone repair road.

"Where the hell are you going?" Sandra asked.

"I just wanna look around, see what's out here ...I've always been curious..."

"Oy. Whatever, let's not take all day though – my dad'll panic and call the highway patrol or something, if he hasn't already."

"Yeah, I'll be quick."

Half an hour later, they had reached a formation of rusty sedimentary rocks five miles back from the highway and hidden behind a larger foothill. Sandra had gotten out of the car first and run to the base of the rocks, her father forgotten in her excitement. The rocks were rough and her boots easily gripped the slanting sides of the rocks. She and Elias easily reached the summit, which was the highest vantage on their side of the hill. The basin spread out before them, uniform in its patchwork carpet of bushes and cacti. Although the sky was nothing but blue and the sun was climbing, there was a wind and the heat was not so intense as the day before. The unbroken moaning of the breeze was the only sound on the top of their rock.

"Fuck!"

"What?"

"My dad! We've gotta go...Now!"

Sandra half fell down the rock's side and just before reaching the car door, Elias seized her by the wrist. She spun around to jerk her arm away, but instead, Elias kissed her. She resisted, trying to talk through occupied lips, but gave up. This was Elias, who she now realized hadn't remained a seven year old boy, but instead had grown broad shoulders and black stubble that now grazed her chin. At this

thought, she pulled back and at this withdrawal, Elias locked his hands around her throat. As his hands tightened, she thrashed in his grip and tore at his clothes. He held his lips to her, though she bit his tounge and lips, and took in her last, gasping breath.

When this was done, he placed her dead arms over his shoulders with her slack mouth gracing his neck. They stood like this for a moment, her corpse draped over his frame with his arms locked around her ribcage, a tableau against Elias's dreamscape of maroon mountains and desert blue sky. The wind's white noise picked up and whipped at their figures until he stepped away to let her fall to the ground, in the end, her hair settling in to a pyro-technic burst against the dust, as a scorpion's pincer pushed up from an opening in the earth.

*Amanda Prince is a second year student majoring in English and History.*

## *Tamales Tristes*

Tamales tristes is the best way to describe them. Who remembers how much chile we are supposed to add? What was the special ingredient that could not be found? Seven women, one kitchen, barely enough masa to go around, but each one of them wanted to have their hands in it. Each one of them wanted to play the role. Only one of them knew how. Seven women attempting to remember all those things they were warned they would need one day. One day fell too soon. The youngest, la nieta, watched from a distance. Memories and thoughts glutted her mind. Abuelita is gone. And if she could see the mess her daughters were making she would turn in her grave. Tamales Tristes, sad and pathetic because there was no special ingredient, she had gone, and left her daughters without a clue. Seven women attempted to make mama's masa, but only one knew how. Tamales Tristes would have to do, because the youngest could only be trusted with soaking the hojas. Maybe, next time she could fill the role that only she knew.

*Adrianna Salazar is a senior, graduating in May, majoring in Social Science with a minor in English. She is pursuing an MA in Chicano Studies and enjoys being in nature, spending time with family and dancing the night away.*

## *Don't Forget My Name*

Mi dulce niña made her entrance into this world on Mexican time. Fashionably late, by two weeks. By the time she was born, my feet were two small moons trying to orbit around the water balloon I had become. At the time me acuerdo que me sovaba la panza constantemente. Feisty girl from the start. She kicked just about every hour. To remind me she was in charge I think. And from a distance she recognized her father's stride. To calm her I would rub my stomach in endless circles and sing her favorite lullaby: Escondida por los rincones. Temerosa de que alguien la vea. Platicaba con los ratones. La probre muñeca fea. Un brasito ya se le rompío. Su carita esta llena de ollín. Y al sentirse olvidada lloró. Lagrimitas de hacerín. Muñequita le dijo ratón ya no llores tontita no tienes razón. Tus amigos no son los del mundo porque te olvidaron en este rincón. Nosotros no somos así. Te quiere la escoba y el recojedor. Te quiere la araña y el sacudidor. Te quiere el plumero y el viejo beliz, también yo te quiero y te quiero féliz.

How do I give her happiness now?

2

The mother looked down at her newborn baby boy. She traced his face. Puffy pink skin, brand new and transparent beneath the pads of her fingers. Translucent to her touch. His eyes were closed. And she wished they had opened once. Involuntarily her pinkie caressed his closed lids and beneath her lashes she saw him at two. His head a little too big for the rest of him and that duck like waddle toddlers possess. A tornado of images circled inside her head: there he was at seven, with his first broken bone. At ten walking out of school hurt and mad. He'd experienced his first betrayal. Seventeen and in love. At twenty in college. Perhaps he played soccer, basketball or baseball. But most likely he excelled in football because that is the one thing his father loved after us. His wedding day. His first child. His first heartbreak. His first sadness, potty training, changing diapers, making formulas, three a.m. breakfast calls, breast feeding even though they warned her it could be painful, fights over curfews and girls, and worrying about his driving. All missed memories she would not have. His name traveled to the back of her throat and attached itself to her ton-

sils. Grew roots of mold and rust. Never forgotten. Never spoken.

3

Son vendedores color de barro, resplendientemente secos. Van gritando por las calles sus sueños. Con lineas de consuelo envolviendo sus ojos, they are majestic shadows marching down the street at night. From afar I hear the rattle of a decrepit grocery basket limp it's way up the avenue. La llorano aulla. Lamento de medianoche echoing throughout the stone street. My mother's living room becomes Mexico in winter. Smell of heated chocolate and pan dulce hot in my hand. Long walks along the milpa before the harvest came. Yearly excursions to El Rancho de Villa to eat pinole, drink Casadorez and pray. On her knees my grandmother sashayed from the entrance of the village to the altar of a burned wooden Christ. Late nights and early mornings spent beneath October skies crackling with light and thunder. Mango trees gnarled in midstride. Guanavanas that look more like prickly light green frogs than edible food. Midnight in East Los is a time trip. I open my eyes wide as my body becomes boneless and my mind begins to freak. In the left-hand corner, parallel to the phone, stands the picture of a woman, slender, tall and strong. Her hands are wide. Long fingers. High cheekbones, quick legs, and a chestnut mane down to her butt. Eyes the color of copal. My mother's eyes bore into my life. She knows my secrets. Above me La Virgen de Guadalupe accuses me of sins committed. I shudder and cringe. Bury my sore body deeper into the floral print of my mother's couch. Hide myself from repraoches she knows and I can't scream. Behind my tightened lashes a progression of images begins: Military style we carried the flag every Monday morning. One, two. Left, right. Now turn. Respectful silence as the national anthem began; Mexicanos al grito de guerra and all the rest I long ago forgot. Neat little soldiers in school uniforms. Gossip gatherings every recess to celebrate our lives. Tío Juan frustated drunk. Felt his painter's hand across my face more than once. Aunt Carmen bent over the comal heating up recently rounded tortillas that still taste like maiz. En la distancia un caballo rellincha. Lalo y Emma died last night. Wax statues commemorate them at the funeral. Her lips the palest pink. With the yellow gown that matched her hair. And a crown of margaritas placed atop her head. Angelic in death when she was not in life. Lalo, little soldier boy stiff with wonder at the approaching parade of archangels who came to judge him. Leticia, my neighbor from two doors down cried with unforseen passion at the wake, outdoing both her mom and his dad. In the small pleasures of life, nothing reaches

the heels of a bareback gallop in the dead of night. Tamales that taste of heaven. Warm with vapor erupting in every bite. Tamales dulces. Tamales de elote. Tamales de cheese. Tamales de beef. Although most relatives prefer pork. Early morning grade school full of flapping tongues I didn't understand, made no effort to learn and forced to reckon with my stubbornness. Two years of silence, followed by five years of non-stopped chatter less important than the weather. Mi papá followed my progress with an Indio silence deeper than any black hole. Mi mamá cried with me when I hurt. Cleaned my wounds and bruises when I fought, which was often. Laughed with me when I triumphed. Clapped for me when I failed. Down tequila shots with me when she needed it. Pulled my ears and sometimes my hair when I disrespected her. Scolded me when I cheated on my boyfriend. Didn't speak to me when I passed up opportunities at work or with men. Let me cry on her shoulder when friends betrayed me and loved me when I loved everyone else but her. I opened my eyes again. Looked up at the altar she'd erected. Wished for the earth to open up like my mother's arms and cradle me. Protect me from the vagrancies of life. Glanced around her living room. Felt cheated by life, death and god. Demanded answers from the shadows who laughed at my pain and howled in my face. Outside sirens wailed. Shots resounded in the distance and somewhere a twelve-year-old boy with my son's face choked to death on his own blood as it squirted out of his tender veins. I rolled over. Twisted myself into a tamale hug, made believe I didn't care. Ignored the Virgen's stare and fell asleep. Dreamt of home and his sleeping stare.

4

Desde que nació I have watched her from a distance. Always too afraid to get close. She was my baby girl. La flor blanca de mis ojos. That is why her mother and I named her Xochitl. As a child she ran to me for comfort. Loved me beyond all others. My name was her first word. Pero crecío and I forgot how to speak to her. Didn't know how to relate to the young woman who fought against me for self-rule. Mi niña de barro y hierro. Unbendable, but easily cracked. From a distance she made me proud. Now from a distance she makes me cry. I am here, flor blanca de mis ojos. Don't forget my name.

*Adriana Serrano is a fourth year student at the Mount. She is gradu-*

*ating this May with a B.A. in Philosophy.*

# Allan Stauffer

## *The Coca-Cola Bottle*

Remember the Coca-Cola bottle? The light green glass kind that you need a church key to open? Yes, that's right, those sexy little eight-ounce numbers shaped like a woman's corseted torso. The shape makes sense, since Coca-Cola Inc. was born just before the corset died.

Let's look back. Imagine the billboards with smiling young women laced tight in steel wire, encouraging us to bring our lips to a glass of refreshing Coca-Cola. And so we did, and quite a lot too, either because the Coca-Cola syrup formula just tasted better or that added boost of cocaine satisfied. Well, maybe it was just the shape of the bottle.

With a satisfied, slightly addicted clientele, Coca-Cola became the most popular soft drink in the United States. It was basically unchallenged until the early 1960s. That's when I was born.

In the mid to late 1960s I spent a lot of weekends with my Grandmother in a typical American affluent bigoted semi-suburb. The best part of these weekends was when she got her hair "done," because she dumped me at the soda shop with the big metal Coca-Cola sign above the word "Sam's," and the sounds of the Beatles, Stones, Byrds, etc., blaring from the juke-box.

I'd sit there with a root-beer float (she said I was too young for a Coke) and watch the girls in tight skirts with hair falling over one eye, dance. They kept folding it back behind their ears, only to have it fall again. It was wonderful. The seats and tabletops everywhere were Coca-Cola label red, and even my float was in a Coca-Cola glass.

I wanted in. I wasn't really sure what "in" was, but it had something to do with red, Coca-Cola, and girls with hair over one eye. So one weekend I asked Sam for a Coke, laying the coins on the counter and refusing eye contact. He served me one! Now I was like the older kids, and part of the seats, and the tabletops! I was in some small, strange way closer to the world in which I lived.

Now Coca-Cola is the most popular soft drink in all industrialized countries, and is quickly becoming popular in third-world countries that can't afford food. Small matter that the salt content prevents Coke from actually quenching thirst, or that medical studies have proven that Coke rots teeth and carbonated drinks damage kidneys. Everybody wants to be part of the Coca-Cola-label-red world, filled

with affluence, girls with errant hair and all other things American.

Considering the bottle closely, I see that the red Coca-Cola logo is above, held aloft, by depressions in the glass that form concave pillars. One, two, three, there are ten of them. Ten pillars propping up the Coca-Cola name, ten dimes to a dollar, a stewed fantasy held aloft by dollars. Eyes closing, I think of my Coca-Cola stock, imagine huge mounds of dimes on street corners in Bangladesh, wonder how many dimes a kidney costs, how many dimes a culture costs, and wonder why I am somehow reluctant to open my eyes again.

*Allan Stauffer is an English major in the Mount's Weekend College program.*

Outside the sun beats down its oppressive blanket of heat. Inside is cool and air-conditioned, relief to the baked skin, but an oppressive weight of a different kind. The smells: cigarette smoke and cigar smoke, cheap sugary perfume and Aquanet, bubble gum and sweat, exhaled breaths laced with alcohol, and fused through it all, the salty iron smell of money. Stale air circulated and recirculated through the bodies of tourists with their Hardrock Café and I-heart-Las Vegas t-shirts, recent 21-year-olds with their rowdy crowds, tan-suited men with gold chains and wingtips, locals with their nonchalant jeans and attitudes, hostesses with the mostesses, flashes of sequins here and there, raised trays, satin bowties, black laced hems, fishnet stockings. Elderly men and women, hunched in their stools over blinking beeping screens, harsh colored light reflecting softly off of translucent skin, the dancing of red, yellow, blue lights on facial features like that seen on younger faces at Penny Arcade or Aladdin's Castle. The same blank eyes, the same repetition, movement of fingers pushing buttons, arms pulling levers, hands dropping quarters and nickels and dimes into perfectly-fitted slots. The same sense of being encompassed, embraced within a small radius of soft, warm glow from a rectangular cube of glass and metal; oblivious. The same devotion, the same need.

Outside the Eiffel Tower twinkles with lights, lowering one leg into a hotel building. A volcano made of water explodes and spews lava. According to a flashing billboard, Elvis is scheduled to perform after the Beatles, and Sigfried and Roy, with their tightly-trousered mystery, advertise their albino tiger, their shark pool, their dolphin tank, their secret garden. Fountains materialize in Bellagio's man-made lake, and beams of water dance their perfectly-choreographed routine to Verdi and Mahler's Ninth. Jupiter towers above Caesar's Palace, thunderbolt raised in hand, and a British ship sinks in Pirate's Cove.

Inside, there is a steady roar. Talking, laughing, calling, crying, screaming, sighing. Music in the background, the beeping and pinging of the machines dominant. The sound of life savings draining away quarter by quarter, dollar by dollar. Dice softly striking felt, metal ball bearings rolling on wood, cards lightly slapping.

David sat slouched at the kitchen table. He had just finished gulping down a tall glass of cranberry juice, part of his nightly ritual, and was content, breathing deeply, basking in the full stomach sensation and tart acidic aftertaste, when his wife started the conversation. He didn't like to breathe and drink and the same time – a fear of accidentally getting fluids in his trachea. On a good night, he could get through the entire glass in one breath.

"So," she said, "What are we going to do when the baby comes? I'm going to have my hands full."

David tipped his empty glass towards himself and inspected a lone drop of juice clinging to the inner rim.

"We'll be all right. I'm sure my mother wouldn't mind helping out."

The silence grew as his wife walked over to the cabinet, took down a glass like his own, walked to the table, sat down, poured herself a quarter of a glass of juice, and took a small sip.

"Well, I wouldn't want to be a burden on her."

"What – are you kidding? She'd love it."

His mother had been asking for a grandson since before he was even married.

"It's not only that ... I just mean ... I'll be really busy with the baby, that's all. I won't have as much time for other things. And you're not even here most of the time ..."

David straightened in his chair and leaned forward, blinking, tilting his ear slightly towards her in confusion.

"I just never realized ... I guess ... your parents." Her sigh was deep and apologetic. "I didn't expect them to stay here so long, even after the baby. When we're trying to build our own family. I never realized they were living with us living with us."

His mouth fell open as he sank away from her into the cushioned vinyl seat back, which let out a defeated sigh of its own. No matter how much time had passed, these reminders, these moments of forced perspective always startled him, asserting themselves at the most unexpected times. Twenty-four years in the secure, all-American, twilight-zone suburb of Hemet had smothered from existence the four in the rank seaport village of Mokpo. It was only in rare moments like these, when forced, that he realized his dual hypocrisy.

"Haven't we talked about this before?"

"Don't get the wrong idea. I love your ... I consider your parents as if they were my own. We just can't possibly take care of them anymore. It's a fact of life, David. Sooner or later you get old, and you

have to deal with it. Would your parents even want to stay here if they knew how we're going out of our way? I don't think so. They wouldn't want you to worry about them, you have your own --"

"Wait."

"They stared at each other.

"Yes?" Her eyebrows peaked, questioning.

"What was..."

They heard a soft shuffle and turned their heads together towards the doorway just in time to see the last, rounded piece of shadow move on the floor and melt into the darkness.

The next morning, David leaned empty at the kitchen sink with his dropped, tired face cast out the window and rinsed his coffee cup again and again. His eyes rested their gaze on a bulging hefty sack and bundle of pale peachy cloth sitting at the edge of the walkway for several filled and emptied cupfuls before his mind finally focused.

The yellow extra-strength drawstrings on the black plastic bag had been manipulated into a single antenna of twenty or thirty knots. The sterile, brisk morning air outside had jarred his mind awake but chilled his fingers beyond use. His lungs excreted each breath in vaporous white clouds of smoke. He glanced up and down the street to make sure no one was watching; opening the bags civilly was out of the question. David grabbed the hefty sack, digging the fingers of his right hand into the thin plastic lining, which stretched, then thinned to a greyish film, and finally gaped open with a jagged rip. Stained envelopes, crinkled sheets of rice paper, folded cards, and old yellowed photographs matted on squares of black construction paper flowed through the tear and fluttered to the snow. David vaguely recognized some of the cheekbones and mouths in the photographs; none of the relatives looked happy. He couldn't decipher any of the writing, which was in Korean. Sloughing off the top layers of paper revealed waves of flowing silken fabric; several traditional hanboks.

David smoothed his left eyebrow with the thumb of his right hand and looked up the walkway, visually following the path all the way up to the frozen porch steps. In the image that invaded his mind, his small, delicate mother struggled, pulling behind her the trash bag in one hand and the cloth bundle in the other, small beads of perspiration disappearing from her forehead as soon as the crisp night breeze hit them, her size 4 1/2 slippered feet sliding now and again on the ice that over the course of an unattended week had built up an inch and a half thick. He shook that image from the air only to see a worse one in its place: his mother sitting on the carpet in her room, surrounded by

open boxes, whose once guarded and treasured contents she now dumped one-by-one into an open, rapidly filling trash bag. In the next, his mother rummaging through her closet, retrieving one traditional costume after the next – this one from the wedding, that one from David's 100th day celebration, filling the trash bag with the layered and embroidered dresses, suits, and headdresses that marked the stages of life.

After some kneading and picking with numb fingers, David finally managed to also unravel the other bag, a bundle made from peach-colored fabric that suspiciously resembled his mother's Bed, Bath & Beyond 200-thread-count bedsheets in Norwegian Salmon. He couldn't help but gasp when he opened up the bundle and saw starched white linen. Two shirts, two pairs of pants, all made with the customary stiff linen that simultaneously evoked simple peasantry and dignified nobility. The traditional clothing of mourning. The white of woven cloth against the white of fresh snow smelled harsh and alpine in the highest part of his nasal cavity, triggering something which filtered up from David's childhood language school days: the Koryo Jang, an ancient royal mandate that temporarily became tradition. All of the elderly deemed too old to be of much use to society were taken into the deepest forests of the highest, most isolated mountains. The duty fell to the firstborn son to carry the parents there on his back in a wood-frame carrier, in much the same fashion they once carried him when he was the helpless one.

****

The most unbearable part of visiting was always the smell. From the threshold on, it weighed thick in the air and though there were sweet undertones of decayed flowers or something regurgitated by a baby or a sick dog, there was also some component he could never quite identify. Some unnatural stench overpowered the familiar smells of rusty death, transforming them into the unearthly. David pictured air being sucked in through wrinkled, leathery noses and whiskered mouths, forced through rotting lungs, diffused into thick bluish arteries raised against the skin and excreted back out in short wheezy whistles. Each breath he took had already been filtered through masses of decaying tissue, and he tasted death in the back of his throat. Actually what he inhaled was not death, but a pathetic defiance of death – death slowly, painfully, unsuccessfully warded off one breath at a time, life pumped involuntarily through bodies by some hidden machinery,

which hummed in the background. What he smelled and could not quite identify was like formaldehyde or embalming fluid, but with life in it.

David was always a bit apprehensive during these visits. Walking down yellow-lit hallways past vacant eyes and slightly drooling slightly open mouths, he sensed bottled frustration and anger; he knew better than to take their helplessness for granted. He almost expected them to leap out of their wheelchairs, wielding canes menacingly, striking out in anger, doing something out of rage. Outrageous. Of course, David has never actually seen anything like this happen. The closest thing was one Valentine's Day when a group of junior high schoolers showed up with their mandatory construction paper hearts. One of the recipients threw his greeting card back at the horrified student and grumbled something about getting those damned kids out of there.

The old lady his mother shares her double room with is always in bed when he arrives, staring straight ahead and gumming some words here and there. Her skin manages somehow to be tough and leathery while simultaneously transparent and frail, evoking in David's mind images of a type of pond spider he once read about. The water spider's venomous bite does not kill immediately, but merely paralyzes the victim, then slowly liquefies the internal organs and bones until the unlucky frog or fish is reduced to a soft, leathery fluid-filled pouch of skin. Some beloved and elusive son named Scotty brings her little gifts now and then – a stuffed bunny for Easter, a felt Santa hat for Christmas, little Pilgrim and Indian (Native American) paper dolls for Thanksgiving; a reversion back to childhood toys.

His own mother is usually looking out the window or sleeping when he arrives. She doesn't talk much, but he has trouble holding her under the same scrutinous examination as the others. He hasn't gotten used to her being this old. He still remembers family camping trips where she would pack a week's worth of food into economy-sized coolers and then spend hours concocting incredible entrees that not only lured small forest creatures but campers from nearby sites as well. They had elaborate gourmet dinners next to their tent in the middle of Sequoia National Forest. Her cooking was legendary amongst church potluck circles, and his father's coworkers. For his fifth grade California Missions project, she toured Mission San Gabriel with him for the entire day and then stayed up nights for a week to help him construct a masterpiece of styrofoam, architecture board, clay, wood, and plastic plants that surpassed all of the other obviously parent-assisted models in his class. There were little silver and stone crosses in the

graveyard and even tiny golden bells in the bell tower that actually jingled.

Of course, his mother has had 2 grandchildren since then, has shrunk a few centimeters in height, has long since given up dying her thinning head of gray hair, has attended the funeral of her husband. None of this fools him, though. He knows she's in there somewhere, that other one. Instead of offering comfort, this makes him uneasy.

Today, for once, she is actually fairly talkative. She doesn't want to be buried in Korea, is what she tells him. She hands him a piece of paper. She wants this read at her funeral: (an ancient Korean poem) "Ode on the Seasons"

The river of January
Now frozen, now melting,
Born into this world,
I live alone.

In October
I am like a slice berry
Once the branch is broken,
Who will cherish it?

On a long November night
I lie on a dirt floor
With only a sheet to cover me
O troubled night.

On a June day I am like
A tomb cast from the cliff.
Once I followed you,
As though you looked after me.

In December I am like
Chopsticks carved from pepperwood
Placed neatly before you:
An unknown guest wields them.

David tries to visualize something reading this at the Glen Oaks Cemetery or Pleasant Hill, to people in black standing around a dark, gaping hole in the ground. Something like this is not really for his mother. What she should have – what she would have had if she were

still in Korea, is a fresh green mound, almost as tall as a person. The perfectly rounded mound would dry golden in the dry season, when all of her extended family would return to picnic, laugh, sing, and leave offerings of food and rice wine to honor her memory. In the fall, the mounds would stand in the fields together like benevolent giants, instead of these cold stony bricks etched with a sharp steel fingernail.

*Nury Yoo is a senior at the Mount. She is majoring in Political Science with a minor in Art.*

$1